

Week 5, 1 Corinthians 5

Hook



Main Point: Local churches have a responsibility to address sin in their congregations.

Group Activity: When was the last time you had to explain something complex to a child? Do you remember how you explained the concept? In the 1994 film *Forrest Gump*, the titular character describes a simile that his mother deployed to explain life: “Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.”¹

How else would you describe life? Below are the beginnings of several similes to help simplify the complex truth of what life is. Break your class into small groups and have them complete one or two of the below in efforts to help the entire class understand life.

Life is like a tin of sardines...

Life is like an onion...

Life is like a sewer...

Life is like a coin...

Life is like music...

Life is like a ten-speed bicycle...

Life is like a taxi...

Life is like that new car smell...

Life is like a tube of toothpaste...

Life is like an elevator...

¹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109830/quotes>

In today's lesson, Paul will use an analogy to help a church understand the destruction that unrepentant sin brings into a community of believers.

What literary devices are used in Scripture to help readers understand complex spiritual truths?

What simile might you use to help explain how the unrepentant sin of one believer damages those in his community? "Sin is like a..."

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Book

Main Point: Local churches have a responsibility to address sin in their congregations.

Text Summary: 1 Corinthians 5

Paul has learned of sexual immorality within the church at Corinth. This particular offense, however, has taken a back seat in terms of Paul's focus in this passage as he turns to the church's lack of action regarding this sin. In short, the church has overlooked the sinful behavior and not purified itself but rather let the sin go unnoticed. Paul urges these Corinthians to rely not on the social status of their members, but instead to rely on Christ. In these verses, Paul calls the church upward to practice true discipleship, which involves the tough action of corrective discipline.

1 Corinthians 5: 1–8 [Read]

Sub-point: Churches are called to discipline believers as a means to protect the body and promote repentance.

As a loving father disciplines his children, Paul now turns the letter to address several specific issues that require addressing; he begins with the Corinthian church's failure to discipline one who has been sinning in their congregation.

The character of the Corinthian church has caught up with itself. The community of the church does not resemble what a true Christ-centered community should look like. Paul is calling attention to the sin of a particular man practicing sexual immorality, but his frustration is more focused on the church's response: They have done nothing. In the midst of public sin, the church has merely stood by and turned its head. Paul's corrective rebuke is less for the individual and more for the communal lack of discipline on the individual. This is what he means when, in verse 2, he calls out their arrogance. They are proud rather than in mourning.

One commentator says they proudly considered this man in sin a member of their congregation, all the while overlooking his grievous sin. They were glad he was a part of their church body.² Why would this be the case for this Corinthian church? Scholars debate whether this man had a prominent social status and as a result, the church feared action. Another possibility is that the church would experience social ruin if they moved toward discipline.³

² Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 65.

³ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 133.

With its inaction, the church displayed its dependence and reliance on its connection to those with social elite status, not on Christ.⁴

Paul wants these Christians to see that discipline within the body of Christ is not judgmental or vindictive; rather it is restorative and keeps Christ's body from hypocrisy.⁵ These verses reveal nothing new. The Church has always struggled in calling out sin. We don't like doing it. We shy away from it. We don't want to cause tension or cross a boundary. We don't want to rock the boat. But Paul tells the Christians here that it is precisely what they must do in the community of faith. This is his aim throughout the remainder of chapter 5.

Just as before, Paul urges the authority of Christ over his own. He comes with authority because Christ has all authority over the Church, not social leaders.

Verse 3 sees Paul exercising his authority, even from a distance, by pronouncing judgment on the man and establishing a road of discipline. In the context of verses 4–5, scholars debate what Paul is saying. It is more likely that Paul is not referring to the physical death of the man in verse 5, but rather removing him from the church body so that leaving him on his own might lead to his repentance.⁶ This simply removes him from the care and concern of the church due to the man's persistent neglect of sinful behavior. Here Paul acknowledges the flesh's opposition to change and rebuke of godliness. The aim, once more, is for the purpose of his final salvation.⁷ Paul uses the same language in 1 Timothy 3:19–20, where correction, rather than physical death, is in view.⁸ The *ESV Study Bible* comments on the nature of the discipline in verse 5:

“Deliver this man to Satan” probably refers to removing him from the church, since those outside of the church are in Satan’s realm (Luke 4:5–6; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19). “destruction of the flesh”— Although it is certainly not always the case (cf. John 9:1–3), personal sin sometimes has grave physical consequences (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Corinthians 11:29–30). “spirit may be saved”— The purpose of the discipline was not to punish the man for punishment’s sake but to effect his restoration to the church and eventual salvation (see 1 Timothy 1:20).⁹

Paul's language in verse 6 implies that the church should know the infectious power of sin. Both the offense and their boasting is causing harm to the church.¹⁰ But Paul urges the cleansing of the body. Paul reminds of the destructive nature of sin and rebellion through the imagery of

⁴ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 68.

⁵ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 92.

⁶ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 66.

⁷ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 137.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2197.

¹⁰ Ibid., 139.

yeast/leaven. Sin doesn't stay isolated; it is not static or nicely contained. It is cancer to the body of Christ and to holiness.

The imagery of leaven is crucial for understanding Paul's point:

Leaven is a piece of dough left over from a previous baking of bread. The leftover dough will ferment and when added to the next batch, it will cause it to rise. But sometimes the leftover lumps would be filled with dirt and disease and other unpleasant things. It would pass bacteria on to the next loaf.¹¹

Christ has come to cleanse the old from coming into the new. He has made a way to remove the old bacteria and disease of sin. This was the mission of His sacrifice.

Without using names, describe an instance in which you witnessed a local church disciplining a member well.

How does someone cultivate a heart that welcomes discipline when needed?

How is sin like leaven? Evaluate the statement: sin begets sin.

Why does Paul bring attention to Christ's sacrifice in verse 7?

1 Corinthians 5:9–13 [Read]

Sub-point: Believers are to disassociate themselves from false Christians who harm the body.

Paul isn't telling the church to isolate themselves from the world. That isn't the point he's making in verses 9–13. This is an issue of identification, not isolation. Paul is encouraging them to identify with Christ, not the world.¹² Paul's aim here is to purify the church, and that means for them to cut off from the body those who are causing harm within the church.¹³ The verb Paul uses is translated "to associate," which is also used in 5:11, and means "to mix up together."¹⁴ Paul is saying not to mix together with those who merely call themselves Christians but don't live by Christian standards.¹⁵ Paul doesn't tell the church to isolate themselves from the world because how then would the kingdom of God move forward if not through the church's missional efforts.

¹¹ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 66.

¹² Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 67.

¹³ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 139.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

His concern in verse 11 is not private eating in the home. Paul's concern is the taking of the Lord's Supper. This is connected with worshipping together and gathering as the body of Christ. It is a reflection of what Christ has done for sin and for His Bride. The one in continual sin does not take the supper out of genuine remembrance and acceptance. Paul tells the church not to take this meal with those in continual sin. They should not be at the table in their condition.

In view here, for Paul, is persistent, unrepentant sin, not struggles with past sins.¹⁶ This distinction is important. All are welcome and sin doesn't keep us from Christ. But the body of Christ is for the Body of Christ.¹⁷

Paul's plea in verses 12–13 is to cleanse the body from sin within. This shows the need for discipline, understanding that discipline is a part of discipleship within the family of God. It is not Paul's job (or the job of the Corinthian church) to judge those of the world but it is certainly the Christian leader's responsibility to biblically enact discipline within the local church. Paul understands the church will not be perfect this side of Christ's triumphant Second Coming. It isn't about not having issues; it's about recognizing them and overcoming them by the power of the Spirit.¹⁸ Verse 13 concludes the chapter with two powerful and brief statements: God will judge unbelievers and remove the unrepentant believer from the congregation.

What does Paul mean in verse 9 when he says not to associate with those who are sexually immoral?

Does verse 12 give Christians grounds to judge one another? What is Paul saying when he says the church is to judge those inside the body?

Why is discipline important to the mission of the Gospel?

¹⁶ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 141.

¹⁷ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

Week 5, 1 Corinthians 5

Took



Main Point: Local churches have a responsibility to address sin in their congregations.

Video: Have your class watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvD-8ZfxFOY>.

This video provides a scientific explanation for how yeast causes bread to rise. The woman in this video explains how yeast, when mixed with sugar, creates carbon dioxide and alcohol. The resulting carbon dioxide creates pockets and causes the bread to rise.

Most recipes require very little yeast in order to leaven the whole lump of dough. Analogously, a little bit of sin in the church can cause the whole church to be influenced.

How is sin like “a little leaven” in the church? How should a church address unrepentant sin within the lives of one of its members?

How can your Bible Fellowship members help one another in your pursuits of holiness?

What measures do you take to uphold sexual purity in your own life?

Lesson Conclusion: We don't like discipline. Discipline comes easily, though, when it relates to personal gain, whether it be our golf score or studying or losing weight. We can deal with that kind of discipline and enjoy the end product. But when something outside of us, say the Holy Spirit through the community of the church, tries to discipline our character or certain habits, we refuse it. We fight against it. We can't see that the end goal of corrective discipline is greater godliness and our own sanctification. That end result is better than anything else we could receive or work toward. We must realize that we are part of Christ's body and because of that, we are to pursue identification with Him and become more like Him every day. And that takes discipline. Let us be more concerned with godliness than selfish gain or fear of man. Find hope that God calls us to holiness and that takes pruning and corrective discipline, which comes graciously through discipleship.

Challenge:

Find someone in your circle of friends to check in on you regularly in regards to your character and fight for purity. Find someone who will ask the hard questions and truly seek to prune you in the areas that you need pruning.

Love those in your life who aren't Christians. Don't forget Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 5. We must love and care for those who are not Christians in order to share the Good News of Christ with them. Don't isolate yourself from those around you who don't attend church.

Fight for the purity of Christ's Church. Don't stand by while sin runs rampant and damages the body of Christ. Let the Spirit use you to battle hypocrisy in your own life and in the lives of those whom you love and are close to you. Pray that the Lord will sanctify you more and more each day into the likeness of Christ.

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