

1 Corinthians 5:1–13

Holiness, Discipline, and the Redemptive Heart of God

Introduction: A Corrective Letter to a Compromised Church

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is largely corrective because the church had tolerated serious spiritual problems. Divisions and pride had distracted them from even more dangerous issues—namely, moral compromise within the body. What follows in this chapter is one of the clearest passages in Scripture on church discipline, not as punishment for punishment's sake, but as a redemptive act rooted in love, holiness, and the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Sin Tolerated Is Sin That Spreads (1 Corinthians 5:1–2)

Paul begins with a shocking report:

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife.”

This sin was not hidden. It was public knowledge. Even the surrounding pagan culture recognized the behavior as immoral. Yet the church tolerated it—and worse, took pride in its tolerance.

Paul rebukes them:

“And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.”

Instead of grieving, repenting, and seeking restoration, the church celebrated its supposed openness. Tolerance of sin had replaced reverence for God.

Discipline with a Redemptive Purpose (1 Corinthians 5:3–5)

Though absent physically, Paul speaks with apostolic authority:

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

This is not vindictive discipline. It is corrective discipline. The goal is not condemnation but restoration. By removing the man from the protective fellowship of the church, Paul hoped the consequences of sin would awaken repentance.

Even here, salvation is central. The purpose is that the **spirit may be saved**. Discipline is an act of love when it seeks to rescue someone from ongoing destruction.

The Danger of Spiritual Contamination (1 Corinthians 5:6–7)

Paul warns:

“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”

Leaven represents sin's corrupting influence. When tolerated, it spreads—affecting attitudes, standards, and spiritual health.

Paul connects this warning to redemption:

“Therefore purge out the old leaven... For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”

Jesus shed His blood as the true Passover Lamb. Just as Israel removed leaven before Passover, the church must remove willful, unrepentant sin because Christ has already paid the price to make His people holy.

Living in Sincerity and Truth (1 Corinthians 5:8)

Paul continues:

“Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Christian fellowship must be marked by integrity, humility, and truth. Worship loses its power when hypocrisy and tolerated sin remain unchecked.

Distinguishing the Church from the World (1 Corinthians 5:9–10)

Paul clarifies a misunderstanding:

“I wrote to you not to keep company with sexually immoral people—yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world... since then you would need to go out of the world.”

Believers are called to live in the world, not escape it. We engage sinners with compassion and truth. The gospel is meant for broken people.

Accountability Within the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:11)

Paul draws a crucial distinction:

“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”

This does not prohibit outreach. It prohibits intimate fellowship that implies spiritual unity when a professing believer persists in unrepentant sin. The goal is to awaken conscience, not to isolate in cruelty.

God Judges the World; the Church Guards Its Witness (1 Corinthians 5:12–13)

Paul concludes:

“For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges.”

The church is responsible for its own spiritual health. Love does not ignore sin—it confronts it with humility and truth.

“Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person.”

Practical Application for Believers

- Refuse to confuse tolerance with love. Love seeks restoration, not affirmation of sin.
- Guard the holiness of the church, remembering that Christ shed His blood to redeem a pure people.
- When discipline is necessary, pursue it with humility, grief, and hope for repentance.
- Examine your own heart regularly, lest hidden compromise spread.

A Challenge to the Church

The church must recover a biblical understanding of holiness and discipline. Grace does not excuse sin—it transforms sinners. A church that refuses to confront sin loses its witness and dishonors the sacrifice of Christ.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If you are not in Christ, understand this: Jesus shed His blood on the cross to forgive sin—every sin. He rose from the dead, proving He is God, Savior, and Lord. The holiness God requires is provided through Jesus, not human effort.

If you will turn to Him, confess your need, and trust in His finished work, He will forgive you, cleanse you, and give you new life. Today, leave the old leaven behind and receive the freedom Christ died to give you.