

CORINTHIANS – THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 6

HOLINESS Whole or half-hearted?

For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I CORINTHIANS 5:7,8

6a: Just a Little Leaven? (5:1-8)

5:1,2 Why on earth would the Corinthians be 'puffed up'? (v.6)

... the case he was referring to was of common notoriety. [Morgan 80]

Paul's words do not necessarily imply that the Corinthians were *puffed up* simply in regard to the act of fornication, proud that it should have happened; he may refer to their general state of inflation, a bubble that this pin at least should have pricked. But in any case the Corinthians' arrogance was sufficient to carry them over, if not actually to evoke, the fornication Paul describes. It could be regarded as an example of the freedom (cf. vi.12; x.23) of which they were proud. They were now spiritual persons, and what they did with their bodies was no longer significant, except in so far as it could demonstrate how completely they had transcended the old moral restrictions of conventional religious life, Jewish and pagan alike. Their reaction could not have been more mistaken. [Barrett 122]

We have here therefore a clear recognition of the perpetual obligation of the Levitical law concerning marriage ... They were puffed up, i.e. elated with the conceit of their good estate ... [Hodge 81-82]

5:3-5 What must we conclude has the *highest* priority among the attributes of Christ?

He is bringing out the solemn nature of the assembly. It is not only a gathering of a few obscure Corinthians. The apostle is there in spirit, and the Lord Jesus is there in power ... Paul conceives of this punishment as remedial ... That he means saved in the fullest sense is made clear by the addition *in the day of the Lord*. At the final day of judgment he expects to see the disciplined offender among the Lord's people. [Morris 88,89]

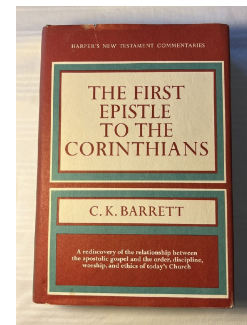
It is a right inherent in every society, and necessary for its existence, to judge of the qualifications of its own members; to receive those whom it judges worthy, and to exclude the unworthy. The right is here clearly recognized as belonging to the church. [Hodge 83]

Somebody might say, "The way to help him is to keep him in the circle, let him sit down with you at the Communion table; do not be hard on him, try to win him back, throw your arms of love about him and sympathize with him." The unrepentant man will be more hardened in his iniquity if you do that. Put him outside in the devil's domain, let him know that he has forfeited all title to a place with the people of God ... When he finds himself abhorred by men and women who love Christ, when he finds his sin is a stench in the nostrils of Christian people, he may break before God. [Ironsides 169-70]

5:6-8 Of what does the 'old leaven' consist? (Matt.16:5-12)

[v.7] One feature of current passover observance was the solemn search for and destruction of all leaven before the festival began (for seven days unleavened bread only might be eaten). This purging out of all leaven was done before the *pascha*, the passover victim (either a kid or a lamb), was offered in the temple. But Paul points out that *Christ our passover* has already been sacrificed. It is time and more than time that all leaven was cleansed out. [Morris 90]

Since Christ's sacrifice of himself, Christians live in the festival he founded, and Christian life consists in thanksgiving to God for his mighty act of love and deliverance, thanksgiving expressed at least as much in action as in speech. If however this is to be taken seriously it means that Christians must not only rejoice (which, it appears, the Corinthians were willing to do) but must also observe suitable paschal purity ... Paul's purpose in using this paschal imagery is clear: the sacrifice has been offered, potentially Christians are participating in a feast which involves perfect purity of character and conduct, and they must make every effort to realize this potentiality. [Barrett 129]



6b: Holiness is Not Social Separation (5:9-13)

5:9-11 Are we to be segregated from sinners, that is, the world? What of sinners in the church?

The term *to company* (mingle) *with* ... strictly denotes living in an intimate and continuous relation with one ... Among the ancients, for a man to receive any at his table was much more a sign of intimacy than in our day ... [Godet 270,274]

The *covetous*, *pleonektai*, are those possessed by the desire to have more, the spirit of self-aggrandisement. [Morris 91]

What is a railer? It is a person who has a tongue loose at both ends and on a pivot in the middle, a vicious talker, an evil speaker, one who can destroy the reputation of another just as a murderer drives a dagger into the heart and destroys a life ... A character assassin is as wicked in the sight of God as one who would take another's life. [Ironsides 173-4]

... it seems unthinkable to Paul that Christians should withdraw from common life into monastic or conventual solitude, though this practice was by no means unknown in the

ancient world ... Christians must take the world as they find it, as Jesus himself had done, eating freely with publicans and sinners (e.g. Mark ii.15). No more for them than for him should this social freedom deny prophetic freedom to criticize and when necessary to condemn; but criticism is not to be exercised by the easy device of withdrawal. [Barrett 131]

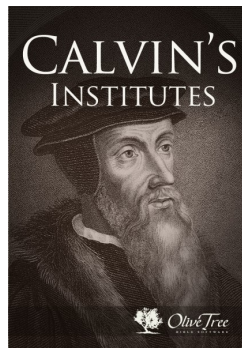
5:12,13 An unchanging tradition -- the world gets the cold shoulder, but we're soft on sin in the church. Should we 'judge' brothers? (Matt.7:1-5)

It seems at the first glance as if this saying were in contradiction to that of our Lord: "Judge not Why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye?" (Matt. vii.1-3). But when Jesus speaks thus, the judgment which He would exclude is that of secret malevolence, which condemns precipitately, on simple presumptions, or putting a malignant construction on motives. St. Paul is equally averse to such judging, xiii.7. The judgment he lays on the Christian as a duty is that of charity, which, in view of notorious facts, seeks the best means to bring a brother back to himself who is self-deceived as to his spiritual state, and to save him (v.5). The former of these judgments is accompanied with a haughty joy, the other is an act of self-humiliation and mourning (v.2). [Godet 277-278]

It should be noted that the power of the Lord Jesus lies behind the act of the assembled church. Paul does not claim to exercise it on his own ... Responsibility for judgement is in the hands of the whole body of believers, not of a small group of ministerial authorities. [Barrett 125,133]

Calvin on excommunication

There are three ends to which the Church has respect in thus correcting and excommunicating. The first is, that God may not be insulted by the name of Christians being given to those who lead shameful and flagitious lives, as if his holy church were a combination of the wicked and abandoned. For seeing that the Church is the body of Christ, she cannot be defiled by such fetid and putrid members, without bringing some disgrace on her Head. Therefore, that there may be nothing in the Church to bring disgrace on his sacred name, those whose turpitude might throw infamy on the name must be expelled from his family. And here, also, regard must be had to the Lord's Supper, which might be profaned by a promiscuous admission. For it is most true, that he who is intrusted with the dispensation of it, if he knowingly and willingly admits any unworthy person whom he ought and is able to repel, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord's body to dogs ... A second end of discipline is, that the good may not, as usually happens, be corrupted by constant communication with the wicked. For such is our proneness to go astray, that nothing is easier than to seduce us from the right course by bad example ... A third end of discipline is, that the sinner may be ashamed, and begin to repent of his turpitude. Hence it is for their interest also that their iniquity should be chastised, that whereas they would have become more obstinate by indulgence, they may be aroused by the rod. This the apostle intimates when he thus writes -- "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess. iii. 14). Again, when he says that he had delivered the Corinthian to Satan, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. v. 5); that is, as I interpret it, he gave



him over to temporal condemnation, that he might be made safe for eternity. And he says that he gave him over to Satan because the devil is without the Church, as Christ is in the Church. Some interpret this of a certain infliction on the flesh, but this interpretation seems to me most improbable ... the legitimate course to be taken in excommunication, as shown by Paul, is not for the elders alone to act apart from others, but with the knowledge and approbation of the Church, so that the body of the people, without regulating the procedure, may, as witnesses and guardians, observe it, and prevent the few from doing anything capriciously. John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [iv.12.5,7]

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