

1 Corinthians

Bible Study

Leaven in the Church

1 Corinthians 5:6–6:7

The Corinthian church had allowed sexual fornication to infiltrate their assembly. This came about because they had been living carnal lives instead of spiritual lives. They had become unable to see sin as God sees sin. Instead of being horrified that one of their members was sleeping with his step mother (or possibly even his mother since it is something that is not talked about among even the Gentiles—1 Corinthians 5:1), they were proud of themselves for being so accepting and loving of this man. Paul told them to send him out from the church and into Satan’s territory—the world—hoping that this would be a wakeup call to stop this ungodly relationship.

Paul was given the authority of an apostle by Jesus Christ. Like Peter, he had the gifts of the Spirit and therefore knew that the report he received about this man was a correct one. Just like Peter knew that Ananias and Sophia had lied to the Holy Spirit, Paul knew, by the Spirit, that the report about the church was correct and what needed to be done.

Lump of leaven (verses 5:6–7)

Paul compares the sin of this man to a lump of leaven. In Scripture, leaven is often a metaphor for sin. This goes back to preparations for Passover in Exodus 12:15. Israel was to clean out leaven from their houses as a picture of cleansing themselves of sin. Jesus warned the Disciples to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees in Matthew 16:6, 12. They were sinning by teaching wrong doctrine about Jesus the Messiah. Leaven is also used in Luke 13:18–21 to show how great Satan’s influence will be during the seven-year Tribulation. It will start small and increase until it consumes the whole world. Notice how the birds who came to eat the sown seed are pictures of Satan stealing away the seed of God’s word in Matthew 13:4, 19.

Paul calls the sin within the Corinthian church leaven, and the innocent members of the congregation are the unleavened lump of dough that is in danger of being consumed by this man’s sin. If left alone, this man’s sin will eventually take over the whole lump of dough (the entire church). One little sin left to fester in any church will eventually affect the whole congregation.

Taking it further, the Corinthian church was proud of how they were handling the situation. It appears that they were boasting about being so loving and accepting of this man. Paul hits them directly between the eyes as he tells them to take swift action in cutting out the leaven from the assembly.

Christ our Passover (verse 5:8)

Paul continues with the leaven metaphor by speaking of the Passover. Prior to the feast of Passover, Israel’s households were required to cleanse the house of every bit of leaven, symbolic of being spiritually clean. When Paul says to keep the feast, he is not speaking of literally celebrating Passover, but is continuing his allegory of the destructive nature of not dealing with leavening within the church.

Israel was saved by properly observing the first Passover by putting blood on their doorway, we are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. He is to us what Passover was to the Israelites. We are symbolically keeping the feast of Passover by following the doctrine of Scripture, that which is sincere and truthful. We are not to follow the old doctrine (the wrong doctrine for us to follow today is called leaven by Paul), but are to follow what Paul has taught the Corinthian Church, the doctrine of Grace.

There are some people who use what Paul says here to show that he was preaching a Kingdom message to Israel. The subject of this passage is that the sin within the church needed to be dealt with. Just as we have been cleansed by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the church needs to rid itself of sin using the holy word of God.

Paul often talks in Jewish terms because he was Jewish and it was natural to pull examples from his background. He also ministered to many Jews. The Corinthian church had many people who came from the synagogue next door. When Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as being our Passover, most in his audience knew what he was talking about. He often related a doctrine of grace to a Jewish concept to help his listeners understand and remember what he was teaching.

Associating with the world (verses 5:9–12)

Paul had written to the Corinthian assembly before he wrote 1 Corinthians. This first letter gave them guidance about living in the world, but not to be a part of the world. This particular letter was not Scripture because the Lord deemed it unnecessary to include in canon. While what Paul wrote was undoubtedly sound advice, it was not inspired as was the rest of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16).

In his very first letter to Corinth, Paul told them to stay away from those who were immoral. Paul had intended for them to shun those believers who were sinning within the church and not that they were to avoid all those who were unsaved outside of the church. How would they be able to be a witness to those outside of the church if they avoided any contact with them? It seems obvious by the content of the first letter that the members in the church at Corinth were well aware about fornication within the church and that they had allowed it to continue. Now Paul makes it absolutely clear that he is speaking about not associating with people within the church who are openly sinning. This does not apply to those outside of the church. In the case of the Corinthian church, they were to take immediate action and remove the sinful man from their congregation. They had an obligation to judge the situation and take action. Contrary to what many people think, it is absolutely proper for a Christian to judge another Christian for their actions by holding them up to the mirror of Scripture. We, however, are incapable of judging the thoughts or intentions of the inner person. That needs to be left to God (Hebrews 4:12).

Lawsuits (verses 6:1–7)

The Corinthians were using worldly judges to settle Christian matters. Believers should use biblical guidelines when approaching disputes between believers. The Bible contains everything we need in order to live godly lives. The world, unsurprisingly, often gives unbiblical advice. For instance, the world often gives bad direction when it comes to abortion or marriage. The world is also very confused about gender and rejects the biblical idea that God created male and female, and each were given different roles. Why would a believer sue another believer and use the worldly system to mediate?

The idea of the world needing to step into Christian matters should be seen as shameful knowing that we will be acting as judges in our eternal life. If we are unable to make proper judgments in this life, how will we be able to do so in our next life? This seems to indicate that what we learn here will be carried over onto eternity.

Judging angels (verse 6:2–3)

Paul first says that the saints (holy ones) will judge the world and that we will judge angels. The word for judge, in this case, most likely means that we will rule over the angels. Angels are messengers and they will play a part in our heavenly position (Ephesians 2:6). The manifold wisdom of God is made known to the heavenly realm through the Church, the Body of Christ (Ephesians 3:10), and so it makes sense that since they are learning through us now that we would continue this role in the eternal state.

We know from the Old Testament that Israel will play an important role in ruling over the world beginning in the Millennial Kingdom. We have no such promise. Paul is speaking to both Kingdom and Body saints as he speaks about ruling in the future. He includes himself for those who will be ruling over angels (verse 3), while speaking of the Kingdom saints in verse 2. They will be ruling on earth while we will be ruling in the heavenly places.

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