

# Sexual Immorality in Corinth

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**Passage:** “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one” (1 Cor 5:11).

**Introduction:** John Geoghan was born in Boston in 1935 to an Irish Catholic family. He attended local parochial schools, graduated from Cardinal O’Connell Seminary in 1962, and was later ordained as a priest. On February 13, 1962, he was assigned as an assistant pastor at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Saugus, Massachusetts (10 miles north of Boston). John Geoghan is considered one of the worst serial molesters in the history of the Catholic Church in America. For three decades, he preyed on young boys in six parishes in the Boston area. Despite his disturbing pattern of abusive behavior, Geoghan repeatedly went on “sick leave” before reemerging at another parish for years. Only in 1998 did the church finally defrock<sup>1</sup> him.

On January 11, 1984, Bernard Law was appointed Archbishop of Boston by Pope John Paul II. That same year, on November 13, Law reassigned John Geoghan to St. Julia’s in Weston (15 miles west of Boston). Years later the *Boston Globe* documented that an auxiliary bishop in Boston warned Law that Geoghan was unfit to return to parish ministry.<sup>2</sup> Law ignored the warning and put Geoghan in charge of three youth groups, including altar boys.

In 1989, Geoghan was once again removed from the ministry due to continued child sex abuse allegations. He was forced to go on sick leave and spent months in two institutions that treat sexually abusive priests. Later he was allowed to return to St Julia’s. Further incidents resulted in his permanent removal in 1993. Geoghan's being defrocked in 1998 was due to a chain of events beginning in 1996.

A woman in Waltham, Massachusetts filed a suit alleging that Geoghan had sexually abused her three sons. Eight months later, a 22-year-old man filed a suit claiming that Geoghan had abused him beginning in 1981 when he was seven. Between 1996 and 2000, 70 people accused Geoghan of sexual abuse. *Boston Globe* columnist Eileen McNamara, after the second suit was filed against Geoghan, wrote on January 15, 1997, “If we are really so relentless in our pursuit of pedophiles, why aren't we also prosecuting [Geoghan] criminally, instead of allowing him to retire in the sheltering arms of his Church?”

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<sup>1</sup> In the canon law of the Catholic Church, being defrocked implies the removal of a bishop, priest, or deacon from the status of being a member of the clergy. It is the most severe penalty in canon law.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Rezendes. “Church allowed abuse by priest for years.” *Boston Globe*. January 6, 2002. Retrieved December 5, 2015.

By the summer of 2001, claims had led to criminal charges and 84 civil suits, 70 by alleged victims and the rest by their family members. After a January 2002 report on Geoghan by the Boston Globe Spotlight Team, the case became a catalyst for revelations of other clergy abuse and church coverups. Dozens of priests were accused of abuse by hundreds of alleged victims who filed lawsuits, forcing the archdiocese to release damaging documents that showed the church's relentless attempts to avoid scandal and protect its reputation. Because it was published at the dawn of the internet age, the Spotlight piece was the first investigative story that went viral.

Paul was concerned about the church's image and reputation in society,<sup>3</sup> and he also had to deal with scandalous sexual immorality among God's people (1 Cor 5:1-13). His approach, however, was vastly different from that of Bernard Law and many other prominent religious leaders. Rather than cover up evil behavior, Paul admonished the Corinthians to address the issue in a prompt, transparent, responsible, merciful and biblically faithful way. What emerges from Paul's admonitions in 1 Corinthians 5-6 is a vision of the church as an alternative community within Corinthian society that holds its members accountable to live as God's separate people.

### Body:

- I. Paul heard "that there is *sexual immorality* among" the Corinthians,<sup>4</sup> and of such a nature that "even among the pagans" it was intolerable ("a man has his father's wife"<sup>5</sup>); his directive was that the offender "be removed from among you" (5:1-2).
  - a. The Greek word *πορνεία* (*porneia*, "sexual immorality") relates specifically to the frequenting of prostitutes, but in the New Testament more broadly applies to other sexual sins: homosexual activity, extramarital sex, incest, etc.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Paul admonished Jesus' followers in Thessalonica to "walk properly before outsiders" (1 Thess 4:12). To the Colossians he said, "Walk in wisdom towards outsiders" (Col 4:5). In his letter to the Corinthians, he was concerned that church members were taking internal disputes to "unbelievers" (1 Cor 6:6); he was also worried that "outsiders or unbelievers" who attend a gathering of Christians might "say that you are out of your minds" (14:23).

<sup>4</sup> Paul had received a report from "Chloe's people" concerning "divisions" and "quarreling" among the Corinthians. He addressed this in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Paul also received reports concerning "sexual immorality." It is not clear if this report came from the same source ("Chloe's people"). Paul had in a previous letter already corresponded with them about "sexual immorality" (1 Cor 5:9). The Corinthians had written Paul a letter that touched on issues concerning sex and marriage (1 Cor 7:1). So the report concerning the issue of incest in 1 Corinthians 5 did not necessarily have to come from "Chloe's people."

<sup>5</sup> By "having" her, Paul means that the sexually immoral person has an ongoing sexual relationship with her. Put another way, "he is sleeping with her."

<sup>6</sup> Larry Hurtado explains that "in pagan Greek texts, the term *porneia* simply designates prostitution, the sale of women's bodies for sex. But ... in Jewish and then Christian texts, *porneia* designated 'a wide subset of extramarital sexual activity' that was tolerated in the broader Roman-era culture." (Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016, 156.

- i. The Greek πόρνη (*pornē*, “prostitute”) refers to a woman who offers her body sexually for money—a prostitute (1 Cor 6:15-16; cf Deut 23:17).
  - ii. The Greek πόρνος (*pornos*, “the sexually immoral”) refers to a man who has sex with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:9).
  - iii. That the problem of *porneia* presented itself more prominently in Corinth is evident by the fact that the word-group *pornē* appears thirteen times in his Corinthian correspondence and seven times in Paul's other letters.
- b. In Greco-Roman society, there was a double standard regarding the sexual behavior of men and women.
- i. Extramarital sex for men was not considered shameful, except among the Stoics. Demosthenes, a famous Greek orator in ancient Athens, said, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children.”<sup>7</sup>
  - ii. Paul redraws the lines of honor and shame by condemning certain sexual behaviors as sinful (1 Cor 6:18; 1 Thess 4:3).
  - iii. Jewish attitudes toward *porneia* were not easily accepted by pagan converts to Jesus (Acts 15:19-20).
  - iv. But a man having incestuous sexual relations with his stepmother was not only condemned by Moses (Deut 22:30; 27:20; Lev 18:7-8),<sup>8</sup> it was considered inappropriate even among pagans in a city like Corinth.<sup>9</sup>
- c. Paul refers to the church’s relaxed attitude toward the open *porneia* in their midst with the word φυσιώ (*physioō*, “arrogant”).
- i. Paul has warned the “arrogant” ones of his soon coming (4:18-19).
  - ii. Rather than being “arrogant,” they should have experienced deep mourning over the situation.

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<sup>7</sup> Demosthenes with an English translation by Norman W. DeWitt, Ph.D., and Norman J. DeWitt, Ph.D. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1949.

<sup>8</sup> Paul believed that the Hebrew Scriptures, including the Mosaic law, was “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

<sup>9</sup> The marriage of full siblings and parent-child incest was abhorred throughout the Roman Empire. Sex with a stepmother was treated like sex with one’s own mother, even if a father had married a much younger wife whose age was within the age range of an older son.

- d. Paul scolds the Corinthians for their complicity and urges that the  *pornos*  “be removed from among you” (5:2).
  - i. Jewish synagogues disciplined their members so long as the disciplines did not violate Roman law. This could include corporal punishment, but the ultimate disciplinary action was exclusion from the Jewish community (cf Jn 12:42; 16:2).
  - ii. Paul expects the Corinthians to follow this model of holding its members accountable. He repeats the command to exclude the  *pornos*  three times (5:4-5, 7, 13).
  - iii. Some scholars believe that the  *pornos*  who was sleeping with his father’s wife “may have been a patron of the Corinthian  *ekklesia*  with whom the congregation had cordial relations and whom it was therefore reluctant to offend.”<sup>10</sup>
  - iv. Given Paul’s vision for mutuality of men and women in marriage (7:4), the stepmother must not have been a member of the church, or else Paul would have brought her under the same judgment as the  *pornos* .
- II. Paul explains how and why the Corinthians are to exclude the incestuous man from the church—they are to gather as a community and deliver the  *pornos*  to Satan (5:3-5).
  - a. Paul did not need to be present to weigh in on how this matter should be handled (5:3).
  - b. Paul recognizes the significance of the church’s disciplinary decisions when they “are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus” (5:4; cf Matt 18:17-20).
  - c. For Paul, to “deliver this man to Satan” involved his expulsion from the community of believers in Corinth into the realm of darkness (cf 1 Tim 1:20; Col 1:13).
  - d. Paul’s ultimate goal for the  *pornos*  (in his expulsion) is “the destruction of the  *flesh* , so that his spirit may be saved...” (5:5).
    - i. The Greek word  *σάρξ*  ( *sarx* , “flesh”) often refers to human sinful inclination in Paul’s letters.

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<sup>10</sup> J.K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 139.

- ii. Paul believes this man “outside” the believing community (no longer treated as a “brother”) would see more clearly his need for deliverance<sup>11</sup> and be led to repentance.
  - iii. Paul assumes that outsiders are welcome at their worship gatherings (14:23) and that they are free to eat at unbelievers’ homes (10:27).
- III. Paul uses a metaphor from Passover to illustrate the result of allowing the  *pornos* to remain in the church—contamination of the whole community (5:6-8).
  - a. Paul uses “leaven” as a metaphor for sin (5:6; Gal 5:9).<sup>12</sup>
    - i. Paul is referring to the small portion of previous dough which was allowed to ferment, then added to the new dough, which in turn was thoroughly fermented to give bread its lightness (sourdough bread).
    - ii. The leaven permeated the dough, making the batch of dough rise when baked.<sup>13</sup>
  - b. After alluding to the symbolic removal of all leaven from Israelite homes (Ex 12:15), Paul then points to Jesus’ sacrifice as the fulfillment of the ceremonial slaying of the Paschal Lamb (5:7; cf Ex 12:5-6).
  - c. Paul invites the Corinthians to celebrate Passover by removing the “old leaven” of “sexual immorality,” “malice and wickedness;” the “unleavened” expression of their new life in Jesus is described in terms of “sincerity and truth” (5:8).
- IV. Paul then makes an important distinction between the church’s relationship with “those inside” and its association with “outsiders” (5:9-13).
  - a. Paul has to clarify what he meant in a previous letter regarding association “with sexually immoral people” (5:9-10).

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<sup>11</sup> In his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul encourages a similar course for idlers/busybodies (2 Thess 3:14; 1 Thess 4:11-12; 5:14). He discourages association/fellowship with these people so “that they may be ashamed.” However, they are not to be regarded “as an enemy” (2 Thess 3:15).

<sup>12</sup> During the celebration of the seven-day Passover festival Jews were forbidden to eat anything leavened.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon fees suggests that “the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as well as being a religious celebration, was probably a health provision. Most likely, because of the fermentation process, which week after week increased the dangers of contamination, the Israelites were commanded once a year to purge their homes of all leaven (Exod. 12:14–20). During the Feast they would bake only unleavened bread, from which dough they would then start up the process again after the Feast” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014, p 237).

- i. Paul did *not* mean that they could not associate with sinners, because that would mean leaving the world altogether.<sup>14</sup>
- ii. Paul's vision for the church is not isolationist;<sup>15</sup> he doesn't believe an unbelieving spouse defiles a believer (7:14), nor does he object to the presence of "unbelievers" in the gathering of God's people (14:23).
- iii. He encourages believers to accept invitations to dinner at the house of "unbelievers," saying they should even "eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience" (10:27).
- b. Paul discourages members of the church from eating with "anyone who bears the name of brother" who is "guilty of sexual immorality or greed,<sup>16</sup> or is an idolater, reviler,<sup>17</sup> drunkard, or swindler" (5:11).<sup>18</sup>
  - i. Five of Paul's six examples of sins that require community exclusion have nothing to do with sex.
  - ii. He indirectly encourages the church to faithfully confront and discipline the greedy, idolaters, liars and perpetrators of violence in its midst.
- c. When Paul asks, "Is it not those inside the church<sup>19</sup> whom you are to judge?" (5:12), he is calling on the Corinthians to conduct an internal judicial process.<sup>20</sup>
  - i. This is repeated in the next chapter when he calls on the Corinthians "to settle a dispute between the brothers" (6:5).

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<sup>14</sup> Although he will later point to associations with the world that are dangerous (1 Cor 10:14–22).

<sup>15</sup> Paul doesn't encourage the Corinthians to withdraw from all contact with their pagan neighbors, like the Qumran covenanters withdrawing to live in the wilderness near the Dead Sea to avoid defilement.

<sup>16</sup> "Greed" meant not just desiring what is not one's own, but often involved carrying through on the desire to the point of defrauding or taking advantage of someone else. This sin is at the root of what he'll address in 1 Corinthians 6:1–11.

<sup>17</sup> "Revilers" refers to various forms of verbal abuse. It means to malign, slander, insult, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Paul gives similar lists of vices that he considers unacceptable among Jesus' followers (6:9; Gal 5:19–23; 2 Cor. 12:20–21; Gal. 5:19–21; Rom. 1:29–31; Col. 3:5, 8; Eph. 5:3–5; 1 Tim. 1:9–11; 2 Tim. 3:2–5; Tit. 3:3; cf. Mark 7:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:1; 4:3; Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

<sup>19</sup> The words "the church" are not in the text. The language of "outside" and "inside" was common among Jews. Jesus used it to refer to those who were not his disciples (Mark 4:11). Paul applies it to non-Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles (cf. 1 Thess. 4:12; Col. 4:5). Jews applied the language to refer to Gentiles.

<sup>20</sup> The theme of "judging" dominates 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. Paul says, "I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing" (vs 3). The verb κρίνω (*krinō*, "judge") appears seven times in these chapters.

- ii. Paul's appeal that they not take internal disputes to outside courts reveals his vision for the church as a subculture within Corinth with its internal own judicial procedures.
  - iii. The implication of the church holding its members accountable is that there would be no need for external lawsuits between believers (6:1).
  - iv. Richard Hays observed, "Churches that have grown up in the intensely private and individualistic ethos of Western culture find Paul's call for corporate accountability disturbing."<sup>21</sup>
  - d. Paul concludes his admonition by referencing Deuteronomy's theme of removing "evil from your midst" (5:13; cf Deut 13:1-5; 17:1-7, 8-13; 19:15-21; 21:18-21; 22:20-24; 24:7).<sup>22</sup>
- V. The implication that the church is to hold its members accountable (5:1-13) is that there will be no need to take internal disputes between believers to outside courts (6:1-8).<sup>23</sup>
- a. A member of the Corinthian church "has a grievance against another member" and chooses to "go to law before the unrighteous" (6:1). As Paul states later, "brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers" (6:6).<sup>24</sup>
    - i. Paul's mention of "thieves," "the greedy" and "swindlers" in the following paragraph (6:10; cf 5:11) suggests that the litigation (6:1-8) is related to material possessions.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 89

<sup>22</sup> Because some sins were considered so perilous to the Israelite community, Moses called for the purging of evil by putting the rebellious persons to death. By not dealing with the unrepentant offender, God's blessing upon the community would be forfeited (cf Josh 7:1-26).

<sup>23</sup> Why does Paul place this discussion about litigation (6:1-8) in between two sections that deal primarily with sexual immorality (5:1-13 and 6:12-20)? Richard Hays explains, "Just as they have failed to discipline the incestuous man, so they are failing to take responsibility for settling their own disputes..." (Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997, p 93). Gordon Fee also sees the linkage with the previous paragraph by noting that "if God's people do not 'judge' those outside (5:12), neither do they go outside with inside affairs!" (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014, p 250).

<sup>24</sup> Scholars believe that most likely the wealthier members were litigating against poorer members. This explains why Paul would say, "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your brothers?" (6:8). Later in the letter, Paul protests against wealthier Corinthians "shaming" those in the church who were of lower status and lesser means (11:17-34).

<sup>25</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 251.

- ii. Paul expresses his horror (6:1, 6), asks rhetorical questions (6:2–4, 5b–6, 7b), uses sarcasm (6:5), and issues a threat (6:8–11).<sup>26</sup>
- b. Paul explains why litigation between believers in a pagan court is unacceptable.
  - i. The church should be capable of settling such disputes (6:5).
  - ii. The way of Jesus (the cruciform life) teaches that it is better to “suffer wrong” than to claim rights (6:7).
  - iii. God’s people “are to judge angels” (6:2).<sup>27</sup>
  - iv. Though not stated explicitly in this section, Paul is concerned for the church’s reputation in society.<sup>28</sup>
  - v. This litigation poses a threat to the unity of the church in Corinth.
- c. Paul asks rhetorically, “Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers...?” (6:5).
  - i. The Jews avoided litigating in a pagan court. “Jewish communities in the Diaspora...established their own court systems and sought to avoid the Gentile courts.”<sup>29</sup>
  - ii. By asking this rhetorical question, Paul is once again alluding to their spiritual immaturity (cf 3:1).
  - iii. Also, by using the word “wise” (σοφὸς, *sofos*), Paul may be targeting “the same upper-class members of the community who claim to possess an exalted philosophical wisdom.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 251.

<sup>27</sup> The idea that God’s people would participate in the judgment of the world and in ruling it in the age already existed among Jews (cf Dan. 7:18, 22; Wisd. Sol. 3:8; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; Rev. 3:21).

<sup>28</sup> Throughout Paul’s letters is expressed concern for the church’s reputation in society (1 Cor 14:23; 1 Thess 4:12; 1 Tim 3:7). Richard Hays comments, “The Corinthians are shamefully taking family disputes out into the streets, as it were, thereby bringing the whole family into disrepute” (Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997, p 95).

<sup>29</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 95.

<sup>30</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 95.



- d. There was systemic injustice in the Roman court systems that favored “higher status litigants.”<sup>31</sup>
  - i. “The overwhelming majority of civil cases were brought by the wealthy and powerful against people of lesser status and means.”
  - ii. “The judges themselves were members of the privileged classes and would ordinarily give preference to the testimony of their social peers against the testimony of those of lower rank...”
  - iii. “...those of high standing had the funds to hire professional rhetors to argue their cases and, if necessary, to bribe the judges.”<sup>32</sup>
  - iv. In the *Satyricon* of Petronius, which offers a unique glimpse into the decadence and corruption of Roman society in the 1st century AD, a character complains, “Of what avail are laws to be where money rules alone, and the poor suitor can never succeed?... So a lawsuit is nothing more than a public auction, and the knightly juror who sits listening to the case approves, with the record of his vote, something bought.”<sup>33</sup>
- e. “To have lawsuits at all with one another,” Paul laments, “is already a defeat for you” (6:7).
  - i. Paul’s heartfelt prayer for the Corinthians, as with all his churches, is “that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1:10; cf Phil 2:1-4)
  - ii. The very thing that authenticates the realness of the Gospel before an unbelieving world is the unity of the church (John 13:35).
- f. Paul appeals to those litigating, “Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?” (6:7).
  - i. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his followers to turn the other cheek, and, when sued at law for their tunic, to yield up their cloak as well (Matt. 5:39–40).
  - ii. According to Peter, Jesus gave the example (1 Pet. 2:23) Paul is calling on the Corinthian litigators to follow.

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<sup>31</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 93.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Petronius Arbiter, Gaius. "Satyricon." Edited and translated by Michael Heseltine and Elaine Fantham. Revised edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 6.

VI. Paul then lists ten behaviors that are incompatible with “the kingdom of God” (6:9-11).

- a. Paul refers once again to the *ἄδικος* (*adikos*, “unrighteous”), which previously was a reference to those outside the church, “instead of the saints” (6:1).
  - i. First Paul says that the *adikos* “will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
  - ii. Then Paul lists the ten behaviors that are incompatible with “the kingdom of God.”
- b. The behaviors of the *adikos*, however, seem to resemble some of the current behaviors of the Corinthians; thus Paul warns, “Do not be deceived.”
  - i. The *πόρνος* (*pornos*, “sexually immoral”) is referred to ten times in the New Testament among those who are “outside” God’s kingdom (Eph 5:5; 1 Tim 1:10, Rev 21:8; 22:15). However, Paul uses *pornos* to refer to a member of the Corinthian church (5:9-11).
  - ii. The *εἰδωλολάτρης* (*eidōlōlatrēs*, “idolater”) is referred to seven times in the New Testament (four of which are in 1 Corinthians), also among those who are “outside” God’s kingdom (Eph 5:5; Rev 21:8; 22:15). But again, Paul warns the Corinthians to “flee idolatry [*εἰδωλολατρία*, *eidōlōlatría*]” (1 Cor 10:14).
  - iii. The *μοιχός* (*moichos*, “adulterer”) is referred to three times in the New Testament (Lk 18:11; Heb 13:4). The word *μοιχεία* (*moicheia*, “adultery”) refers to sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not their spouse. It is a form of *porneia* (Matt 15:19).
  - iv. The *μαλακός* (*malakos*, “passive homosexual partner,” LEB) seems out of place in this list. It means “soft” or “gentle” (Matt 11:8; Lk 7:25). Only here is it used in a sexual, sinful context. In Ancient Greece, it referred to males who allowed themselves to be used homosexually.<sup>34</sup>
  - v. The *ἀρσενοκοίτης* (*arsenokoitēs*,<sup>35</sup> “dominant homosexual partner,” LEB) is referred to only twice in the New Testament (1 Tim 1:10). Some

<sup>34</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 613.

<sup>35</sup> The Greek word *ἀρσενοκοίτης* (*arsenokoitēs*) is a compound word made up of the words *ἄρσεν* (*ársēn*), meaning “male”, and *κοίτη* (*koitē*), meaning “bed”.

scholars believe it refers to “a male who engages in sexual activity with men or boys,”<sup>36</sup> though there is no consensus on its exact meaning.

- vi. The word κλέπτης (*kleptēs*, “thief”) derives from the verb κλέπτω (*kleptō*), which means “to steal.” It appears sixteen times in the New Testament and is always translated as “thief” in English translations.
  - vii. The πλεονέκτης (*pleonektēs*, “greedy”) is “one who desires to have more than is due.”<sup>37</sup> This word is used outside of 1 Corinthians only in Ephesians 5:5.
  - viii. The μέθυσος (*methysos*, “drunkards”) can refer in Greek to a person who is addicted to alcohol or who is drunk on a particular occasion. It appears only twice in the New Testament, both in Paul’s vice lists in 1 Corinthians (5:11; 6:10). It also appears twice in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (Pro 23:21; 26:9). The verb μεθύω (*methyō*) is used to describe the behavior of the wealthy in Corinth (1 Cor 11:21).
  - ix. The λοιδόρος (*loidoros*, “reviler”) is a person who is verbally abusive to others. In the New Testament, it is only used in 1 Corinthians (5:11; 6:10). Jesus “was reviled [λοιδορούμενος], [but] he did not revile in return” (1 Pet 2:23).
  - x. The ἄρπαξ (*harpax*, “swindler”) is referred to five times in the New Testament. The Pharisee thanked God that he was not an “extortioner [ἄρπαγες]...like this tax collector” (Lk 18:11). In a parable, Jesus speaks of the thief who enters a house to “plunder [ἄρπάσαι]...goods” (Matt 12:28).
- c. With the words “such were some of you,” Paul reminds them of the transforming work of the Spirit in their lives and their new identity as God’s holy people (6:11; 1:2).
- i. Paul uses three verbs in the past tense—ἀπολούω (*apolouō*, “you were washed”), ἀγιάζω (*hagiazō*, “you were sanctified”), and δικαίωω (*dikaioō*, “you were justified”).

<sup>36</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 158.

<sup>37</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 824.

- ii. When they believed they were “‘washed’ of the guilt of previous sins, ‘set apart’ (‘sanctified’) for God and God’s ways, and given right standing with God (‘justified’), a new relationship with God that entails no more condemnation for their past sins.”<sup>38</sup>

VII. Having addressed a type of sexual immorality among the Corinthians that even the larger Greco-Roman society considered unlawful (**5:1-13**), Paul proceeded to deal with a common practice in Corinthian society—men having recreational sex with prostitutes (**6:12-18**).<sup>39</sup>

- a. The Corinthian slogan “All things are lawful for me” is repeated twice (**6:12**), followed by two qualifying statements from Paul—“not all things are helpful” and “I will not be dominated by anything.”
  - i. The phrase “all things are lawful for me” appears twice later in this letter (10:23).
  - ii. This Corinthian slogan may have been “used to justify their conduct.”<sup>40</sup>
  - iii. It appears that “some men within the Christian community were going to prostitutes and arguing for the right to do so.”<sup>41</sup>
- b. Another slogan the Corinthians may have used to defend their “sexual immorality” was that “food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” (**6:13a**).
  - i. In other words, just as “eating is a natural activity... one bodily function is much like another. Fornication is as natural as eating.”<sup>42</sup>
  - ii. The basis from which the Corinthians have argued that going to prostitutes is permissible is the notion that the body doesn’t matter.

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<sup>38</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 166-167.

<sup>39</sup> This pericope presents a challenge to Bible readers because it contains, according to many commentators, several Corinthian slogans, “though there is debate over which of the phrases might represent the Corinthian position” (Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017, p 301).

<sup>40</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 98.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 276.

<sup>42</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 98.

- iii. After all, “God will destroy both one and the other.”
  - iv. Paul counters their dualistic theology by stating that “the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” **(6:13b)**
- c. Paul continues by giving theological reasons for why the proper treatment of the body matters:
  - i. “God raised the Lord [in bodily form] and will also raise us by his power” **(6:14)**;
  - ii. furthermore, “your bodies are members of Christ” **(6:15)**<sup>43</sup>; and
  - iii. finally, there are spiritual consequences for having recreational sex with prostitutes, since “he who is joined [sexually] to a prostitute becomes one body with her” **(6:16)**.<sup>44</sup>
- d. Paul then states that having sex with prostitutes and being one with the Lord are mutually exclusive, since “he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” **(6:17)**.
- e. Paul then issues a strong imperative, “Flee sexual immorality” **(6:18a)**.<sup>45</sup>
  - i. Paul uses the Greek verb *φεύγω* (*pheugō*, “flee”).
  - ii. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, *pheugō* appears four times in Genesis 39.
  - iii. Potiphar’s wife tries to sexually seduce Joseph, but rather than giving in to her, he “fled [*pheugō*] and got out of the house” (Gen 39:12).
  - iv. Christians are to “flee” from sexual immorality with the same intensity and resolution that Joseph had when fleeing from Potiphar’s wife.
  - v. Paul uses the same verb later to encourage Christians against “idolatry” (1 Cor 10:14).

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<sup>43</sup> Paul will develop more fully the notion that believers are members of the body of Christ (12:12; Eph 5:23).

<sup>44</sup> On this latter point, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, which states that husband and wife “become one flesh” when they have sexual intercourse.

<sup>45</sup> The Greek verb *φεύγω* (*pheugō*, “flee”) is found here in the present imperative mood, in the active voice, in the second-person, plural form—*φεύγετε* (*pheugete*). It could be translated as: “ya’ll should always be fleeing from sexual immorality,” because in the *present imperative*, neither the beginning nor the ending of the action (in this case “fleeing”) is implied.

- vi. As Jesus said in his sermon on the mount, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away...And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away” (Matt 5:29-30).
- f. Paul speaks of the unique spiritual damage caused by “sexual immorality” (6:18b).
  - i. “Every other sin a person commits is outside [ἐκτὸς, *ektos*] the body...”
  - ii. Committing *porneia*, unlike smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, gluttony, drug abuse, etc., is a sin against one’s own body.
  - iii. Not that these pernicious habits don’t do physical damage to our bodies. Science has demonstrated that they do a great deal of damage, but as Jesus said, what is ingested by the mouth has no power to morally defile a person (Matt 15:11, 17).
  - iv. What causes physical harm indeed has an impact on the whole person. For example, alcohol impairs judgment, which will indirectly impact moral character through the decisions made under the influence.
  - v. Paul himself believed that “nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom. 14:14).
  - vi. But for Paul, *porneia* seems to be unique in that it defiles the “temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (6:19).
- g. For Paul, to “glorify God in your body” (6:20) requires abstinence from “sexual immorality.”

**Conclusion:** The church in Corinth was tolerating “sexual immorality” among its members that was so scandalous that it was not “even named among the Gentiles” (vs. 1). Paul tells them that “those inside the church” are to be held accountable (vs. 12). He encouraged association outside the community but discouraged table fellowship with people claiming to be disciples while living sexually immoral lifestyles. For Paul, “immorality inside and apparently sanctioned by the church was far more likely to lead Christians astray than the immorality of non-believers would.”<sup>46</sup> Alluding to Deuteronomy, he wrote, “Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person” (5:13).

Such drastic measures were necessary because:

(1) *The church’s witness in society was being compromised.* The church doing nothing about the scandalous incest that was of a nature that even non-Christians would have condemned (vs. 1)

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<sup>46</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 470.

would compromise their witness in Corinthian society. That Paul was concerned with the image of the church in Corinth appears in his warning to believers not to sue each other, which was being done “before unbelievers” (1 Cor. 6:6; see also Rom. 2:24).

(2) *The sexually immoral person needed redemption.* However one interprets Paul's instruction to “deliver” the immoral person “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,” it is clear that the ultimate goal was “that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5). Though Paul's instruction seems severe, it had in mind the best interest of both the immoral man and the church. Paul's intent was not for the immoral man to be “swallowed up with too much sorrow” (2 Cor. 2:7), but for him to experience repentance and remorse. Paul later instructed the Corinthians to “reaffirm your love to him” (vs. 8). When “anyone among you wanders from the truth,” writes James, the goal of the church should always be to bring “him back” “from the error of his way” (Jas 5:19-20).

Finally, (3) the *spiritual health of the church was at stake*. The immoral man needed to be removed from the fellowship of the church because, as Paul explains, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6). Jews understood yeast to be a symbol of something small that had the potential to affect a much larger or more significant situation. Disfellowshipping the immoral person meant preserving the purity of God's people in Corinth. Furthermore, Paul's instruction for the church to “put away from yourselves the evil person” was rooted in the Old Testament teaching that required eliminating the Israelite camp of evils which would influence others to sin against God. Perhaps Paul was alluding to church discipline when he admonished Timothy to “rebuke [sin] in the presence of all, that the rest may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20).