

## 1st Corinthians Chapters 4 and 5 – John Karmelich

1. If I had to pick a title for this lesson, it is "behavioral issues within the Christian church".
2. Chapter 4 deals with Paul's authority as an apostle. Paul's main point is that he understands that he is to be judged by God for his behavior as a Christian, and it doesn't matter in that sense what the church in Corinth thinks of his behavior. With that said, Paul is trying to teach all Christians the proper attitude about how we view ourselves and other Christians.
  - a) The Christians in Corinth were broken into factions because they each followed different teachers thinking their "favorite" teacher was the right way to go. Paul counteracts that argument by stating in effect, "I don't even judge myself", therefore, I don't even care what you think of me personally. What I (Paul) do care about is that you are obedient to God and follow Jesus Christ in all that you do. We as Christians are not broken into factions following individual teachers. We all are to follow Jesus and that's it.
  - b) With that said, we as Christians are to judge the behavior of other Christians, as God gives us that privilege and duty. At the same time, we are to realize we are all accountable to God for our lives, and not each other. In that sense, we let God judge our behavior as our judgment is "tainted". In practice that means we study the bible as to how God expects us to live and act and use that as our standard for living.
  - c) Tying this to the lesson theme, the point is the church is to primarily focus on how we should serve God, and not on our favorite pastor or teacher. We are all to be judged by God based on our obedience to Him in our lives.
3. This lesson also includes Chapter 5. The topic "appears" to change in that Paul is now talking about a specific sin within the church. In a sense, the issue does not change. The church in Corinth is full of "pride" in that they are tolerating a specific sin in the name of "love" instead of doing the proper thing of excommunicating the sinner until he or she repents.
  - a) The over-riding issue in Chapter 5 is the same as Chapter 4: "Behavior issues in the church". Paul's main point in this chapter is the church should not tolerate this type of bad behavior within the church.
4. Think of it this way: The overriding problem with the Christians in this city is that their pride got in their way of their relationship with God. The fact that the church was divided into factions shows that their individual or group pride got in the way of their worship of God. The fact that they were willing to tolerate unrepentant sin in the name of "love" is a sign of pride as well.
5. Chapter 4, Verse 1: So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.
  - a) Whenever one sees a "then" at the beginning of the sentence, one should look at the previous verse (or verses) to find the "what" that goes with the "then".
    - i) The last point made in Chapter 3 is that Christians should not be loyal to either Paul or Apollos or any human leader. We are all followers of Jesus Christ. He is the foundation of the church. All of us are then to work in unison to serve Him.
  - b) Given that point at the end of Chapter 3, Paul then goes on to say that men (Christians) ought to regard us (Paul, Peter, other early Christian leaders) as servants of Christ and those entrusted with the secret things of God.
  - c) What does "servants of Christ" mean in this verse? It comes from a Greek word meaning "under rower". If one can think of the ancient war ships, there was usually a boat full of people on the bottom level rowing. The rowers couldn't see where they were going and rowed based on how hard the officers told them to row. It was considered one of the lowest slave-jobs in the ancient world. Paul's point is that servants of God out to think lowly of themselves as "servants of Christ" and not anything special.

- i) We as Christians out to see ourselves as "under rowers" and be willing to be the "lowest of slaves" in order to serve Christ.
  - d) The second thing Paul brings up is "those entrusted with the secret things of God".
    - i) The idea of "those entrusted" comes from a Greek term that means "house manager". The idea is one who is in complete control of the household. In the ancient world, a slave could also have a good amount of power, including being in charge of a large household of servants.
    - ii) Onto the next question: What is the "secret things of God?" The concept is the things that can only be "divinely revealed" and then taught to others. Paul and a handful of other early Christians received direct revelation from God, how to live a life pleasing to God and the "basics" about the Christian life.
    - iii) Paul was then entrusted with that information to pass it on to others. We as Christians preach on what it takes to receive eternal life and how to live a life pleasing to God. We too are passing on those "secret things of God" from one generation to other.
6. Verse 2: Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. <sup>3</sup> I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.
- a) If a person trusts you to complete a task for them, we will be judged by that person based on whether or not we were faithful to complete that task. If God calls on you or me to complete a specific task, God wants us to be faithful to complete that task.
  - b) Paul's point is that he does not care what humans think of his duty to God. Paul is being judged by God and was specifically called by God to preach the Gospel message. Paul realizes that He is working for God and he doesn't care what people think of him.
  - c) So why is Paul making such a big deal about this? For starters, remember that the Christians in Corinth were divided in factions. They were busy judging which of the Christian leaders they wanted to follow most. Paul is trying to urge them to follow Jesus and not any particular teacher, including himself.
  - d) I don't think Paul cared a lot what the Christians in Corinth thought of him personally. What Paul did care about is the fact that they put their trust in Jesus and that they spiritually grow as individuals and as a church.
  - e) Paul realizes he is accountable to God for his actions. When Paul was put on trial in some human court for his actions, Paul just sees it as a witnessing opportunity for Jesus and nothing more. Paul understood his purpose for living.
  - f) Does this mean God calls on us to quit our jobs and go on the road to preach the Gospel? Sometimes. God calls us to our own individual ministry. God often just calls us to minister to our families and those who are around us. In some cases, God calls us to go on the road and do missionary work. My point here is God does not call all Christians to be like Paul, but at the same time God does call some to go out and preach.
  - g) Verse 3 starts with "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court".
    - i) It is ok for a Christian to listen and accept a sincere compliment. At the same time, a Christian out to be willing to accept a sincere rebuke. A Christian cannot be insensitive to the feels of those around him or her. At the same time, we are to realize that we are ultimately accountable to God, and not to those around us.
    - ii) We have to remember that in the end, it is not the people of our church or our community that we are accountable to, but God for our actions.
  - h) Notice Paul says at the end of Verse 3, "I don't even judge myself".
    - i) Let's face it, we as often the worse judges of ourselves. We tend to paint a rosy picture of our own life. The point is we have to be careful not to trust in our own opinions of ourselves, but to compare our lives to Scripture and understand that God is the one who ultimately judges us.

- i) Paul says in Verse 4, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent."
  - i) Paul is not claiming he is sinless or not susceptible to criticism or false flattery. The point is Paul is aware that it is God alone who judges him.
- 7. Verse 5: Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.
  - a) I explained in the last chapter the fact that Christians get "rewards" in heaven based on how we acted as believers. The point is all Christians are to be judged one day.
    - i) We as Christians tend to think of "judgment" as only for nonbelievers. It is true that nonbelievers will be judged based on how they lived their lives.
    - ii) At the same time, we as Christians have to remember that we too will be judged. The judgment for believers is different. Paul said in Romans 8:1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." I believe that is more than the fact that Christians are saved. The idea is that we will not be condemned for our sins. At the same time, God is going to commend us for the things we did for Him and the works we did only for ourselves will "burn up".
    - iii) If you recall from the last chapter, our works are compared to "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and stubble". God judges the lives of believers based on how we lived for Him. The "burn up" refers to things we Christians did that were not pleasing to God. They burn up like wood, hay and stubble.
  - b) Paul's point is that God will judge if Paul was faithful to His calling. At the same time, God will judge you and me based on how faithful we are to the ministries we were called to get involved in. The question is, "Have you lived your new life in Christ for Christ? Have you lived your life to make a difference for Him?" That is how we will be judged.
    - i) Given that fact, Paul makes a conscious effort not to judge himself, nor let anyone else judge Paul's motivation.
    - ii) At the same time, Paul was worried about the factions being created in Corinth. Paul was not concerned at what the Christians thought of him so much as they were not growing spiritually and being divided into factions. To realize we are being judged by God does not mean we stay on the "sideline" for Jesus.
    - iii) Paul did care about Christians growing in their faith in God, just as we as Christians should care about our growth and try to help those around us grow.
  - c) Since God will judge us all one day, we should want His praises and not the praises of men. There is nothing wrong with accepting a sincere compliment. The point is not to let that compliment go to our heads and think we are better than someone else on that particular issue. All we have comes from God. We need to remember that when we get a compliment on some issue.
- 8. Verse 6: Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.
  - a) In Verse 6 Paul says that he has applied these "things" to himself and Apollos. What things is Paul talking about? It is the concept of not judging himself and the realization that God will judge Paul, Apollos, you and me based on how we lived our life.
  - b) Paul quotes the saying "Do not go beyond what is written".
    - i) This is not a bible quote, but a concept of not to go beyond what is taught in the bible for oneself. One way to go "beyond" God's teaching is to exalt oneself over another or exalt one's favorite teacher or favorite Christian over another.
    - ii) The problem with the Corinthian church is they were exalting their favorite teacher over another. It is a "pride" issue. Yes, this is common today.

- iii) Occasionally I will hear other Christians say, "I would never go to that church over there", (referring to other true Christian churches) as if somehow one was more important than the other. We may not like the worship style of the church across the street, but that doesn't mean our "version" of Christianity is superior to the other. That is the idea of "division" that Paul was teaching against.
    - iv) It wasn't that the Corinthians were worshipping Paul or Apollos as little gods, but they were putting their favorite teachers above other teachers as being superior. It is the same way Christians put their favorite teacher as being superior to the pastor or teacher of the church "across the street".
  - c) This reminds me of a joke: "A religious Jew was stuck by himself on a desert island for years. When he was rescued, there were three huts on the little island. The guy built all three huts. The first was where he lived. The other two were synagogues. The rescued man said, "I attend service at this one. As to the third one, I would not go there if they paid me." ☺ That joke illustrates the problem with "factions".
- 9. Verse 7: For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?
  - a) The point of these questions is that all we have comes from God. If He gets all the credit, why are we boasting in what we have and what we received? This goes back to the point of giving God the credit for the rewards we have in life, and not ourselves and others.
  - b) What Paul is doing is trying to teach us not to be boastful about the gifts and talents God has given us, because those gifts came from God and not from us.
    - i) As one pastor put it, "When we are in the womb, did we ask God for the gift of a great singing voice, or the ability to be a great speaker?" No. God in His own wisdom decided what gifts and talents to give us and we can't take credit for it.
    - ii) If we realize those gifts are from God, why do we boast about what we have or what we are capable of doing? Why don't we just give God all the credit and not credit ourselves with our abilities.
    - iii) Remember from Chapter 1 that the Corinthian church was "rich" in spiritual gifts. We'll get more into that in later chapters. The problem is they were crediting themselves and not God. At the same time, they had "pride" problems and it manifested in the divisions they had in their churches.
- 10. Verse 8: Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings-and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!
  - a) Obviously, Paul is being sarcastic in this verse. Paul is condemning the Christians in Corinth for their lack of trust in God and the fact they were giving themselves all the credit for all the things they have in life.
  - b) Remember that Corinth was a rich city. The Corinthians did not believe Jesus had already come back, but maybe they believed that since they "we're" going to be kings, they should start acting like one! That is a reason why the Corinthian's were in factions. They believed they were going to rule and started going into factions about "ruling".
    - i) I'm reminded of Revelation 3:17. It says, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." The point is if Christians think that they are set for eternity because they are financially wealthy in this life, such people are sadly mistaken about what Christ demands of us and how we should live."
    - ii) The point is not to take a vow of poverty. The point is to not "cling" to the riches of this world, as they have no eternal value.
  - c) These Christians were missing out on the blessing and satisfaction that comes from Jesus words of those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness". (Matthew 5:6). This sentence is a quote from John MacArthur's commentary on this verse.

11. Verse 9: For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.
- a) In the Roman world, when a Roman general came back to Rome victoriously. There would be a big procession into the city. Part of that procession included a whole bunch of prisoners that were sentenced to die. The way they were killed is they were put in the public arena (think of the Roman coliseum) where they would face animals that would kill them. Such prisoners were made speculates in front of thousands of witnesses.
    - i) That is probably what Paul had in mind in this sentence. That is because the prisoners were at the end of this victory procession.
    - ii) Remember the "earthly rewards" Paul got for preaching the Gospel: He was beaten constantly and driven out of town all the time. The price to be paid when we are used mightily by God is one is rejected by this world. As I like to say every now and then, "If you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing Him sometime!"
    - iii) Paul was comparing the lowly life of the apostle with how "highly" the Christians in Corinth thought of themselves.
    - iv) Corinth, like America today, was a financially successful place to live. Most Americans have never experienced true poverty on a life long basis like exists in most of the world. I suspect Christians in Corinth lived a similar "high-life". Again, I am not calling us to live a life of poverty, but for us to consider the value of "money" in comparison to eternity.
12. Verse 10: We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! <sup>11</sup> To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. <sup>12</sup> We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; <sup>13</sup> when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.
- a) Paul is continuing to describe the "lowly life" of an apostle. If you study the life of Paul in the book of Acts, it is not a life of riches and glory. He was beaten, persecuted, cursed, slandered, and treated lowly for His belief in Christ.
  - b) Paul says in verse 12, "We work hard with our own hands." In the Roman world, the lowest of slaves did all the manual labor and the Roman citizens were "above that". It is a simple illustration about how lowly a life was that of an apostle.
    - i) In 2nd Corinthians Chapter 11, Paul again described the personal suffering he endured as a Christian. At that point, Paul described how he had been beaten almost to death several times, shipwrecked three times, and is all sorts of dangers from persecution. Paul suffered, hunger, hardship and lack of help at times.
  - c) Paul's point here is not to belittle himself or even to make the Corinthian church fell sorry for him. The teaching point is about how we are to live for Christ in all that we do.
    - i) Getting back to Jesus teaching about "hunger and thirsting for righteousness", the idea is we as Christians should care about others getting saved. We as Christians should care about others growing in their faith and trust of Jesus. We should care about our own relationship with God more than "stuff".
    - ii) The condemnation of the Christians in this town is that they were primarily focused on themselves and their lives and not about growing in their faith in God.
    - iii) Paul is not saying we all have to take a vow of poverty and live on the road for Jesus. What He is saying is that we have to be willing to give up "all" for Jesus. God calls us to trust in Him no matter what that means. God may call you or me to be a witness to those around us or He may call us to go on the road and be missionaries at some remote location. The point is our lives don't belong to ourselves anymore, it belongs to God. Committing one's life to Jesus is about the willingness to give up our own lives and do whatever God commands us to do.

13. Verse 14: I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. <sup>15</sup> Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.
- a) Paul's point is not to shame the Christians in this city, but to warn them.
  - b) Paul compares himself to a "father" in that Paul started the church in this city. A good father disciplines his children and is not embarrassed or afraid to use discipline as a tool to help the children grow up right and make the right decisions.
  - c) Paul says, "Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers". The ten thousand guardians is probably a reference to angels who watch over us and probably help us in ways we don't realize.
  - d) Verse 15 seems like a bit of a contradiction. Paul spent a lot of time telling us earlier in this letter how He is not any more special than any other Christian. Now here Paul is comparing himself to a "father" over this church.
    - i) God calls us to individual roles and responsibilities. As a Christian Paul is no more or less important than any other believer. At the same time, Paul did start this church and Paul wanted to see the Christians in this city grow in their faith.
    - ii) For our local churches, the head pastor is no greater a Christian than you or I, but that pastor is given the duty of ministering to the people of his church. That is the role and responsibility that Paul is saying in this verse.
14. Verse 16: Therefore I urge you to imitate me. <sup>17</sup> For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.
- a) Earlier, I said that a good father disciplines his children. Here in Verse 16 is a related point. Paul urges the Christians to imitate him. Children watch the behavior of their parents. I will argue we are far more influenced by our parents behavior then anything they say and do. Children will not take the parents advice seriously if the parents are not "walking the walk and talking the talk".
    - i) This is not saying we have to be perfect in front of our children. At the same time, when we mess up, apologize to our kids and confess what we did was wrong.
  - b) For some unstated reason, Paul was unable to personally travel back to Corinth. Paul believed he was needed elsewhere and stayed for the moment in Ephesus from where the letter was written. Paul is saying here in Verse 17 that he is sending Timothy.
    - i) If you read the book of Acts, Timothy was a younger, traveling companion of Paul who he was training to be a missionary and pastor.
    - ii) Paul states that Timothy agrees with what Paul teaches and is a good person to send in Paul's place as they pretty much agree on Christian doctrine.
15. Verse 18: Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.
- a) Paul understood that some people would be complaining that Paul himself would not be coming personally. Here in this letter Paul is saying he is like a father to the church in Corinth and writes how much he cares about them. At the same time, Paul is saying he can't come personally to deal with their problems, but is sending Timothy in his place.
  - b) This verse also teaches me that just because it is somebody else's "will" for you or me to be there in person, it is not necessarily God's will for us to travel there.
    - i) Did God personally tell Paul not to travel back to Corinth? We don't know as the text here and the text in Acts is silent on that question.
    - ii) Sometimes God gives us direct revelations. If God is God, He can speak to us whenever and however He wants. Often, the decisions we make in life are simply based on regular prayer, regular study of God's word, and then just going out and making the best decision possible.

- c) I'm sure Paul was tempted to travel back to Corinth and I suspect Paul even prayed about it. The point is Paul felt it was the best decision to move on to other ministerial callings and send this letter to Corinth.
16. Verse 19: But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.
- a) A key point in these last three verses is the word "power". Anyone can talk. Non-believers can spend lots of time and resources talking of God or a lack of God. The key is the power to demonstrate the truth.
- i) There is a famous Gospel story of the man who was lowered through a hole in the roof on a bed so Jesus could heal him. Jesus told the man "Your sins were forgiven" as to imply it was due to some sin that he got into this condition of being stuck in bed and can't get out". Jesus then healed the man after forgiving his sins. One reason Jesus healed him was to show the crowd Jesus had the power to forgive sins. (Matthew 9:1-7, Mark 2:1-10, Luke 5:17-24).
- ii) Jesus said to His disciples near the end of his ministry, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12).
- iii) The point is God gives us the power to demonstrate that Jesus is God and all of this is "real". It doesn't mean God will automatically perform a miracle if we ask for it on the spot. On the other hand, I have witnessed lots of great miracles in situations where it led someone to Christ or strengthen someone's faith.
- iv) I tend to see the most miracles in those who are "new believers". As people grow in their faith, God tends to "back up a little" and see if we still trust Him.
- b) Now let's apply this "power" to these verses. Paul is talking about the "arrogant" among the Christians in Corinth. Why does Paul call them arrogant? These are the people who are dividing the church into factions and saying we need to follow "this person" or "that person" instead of just following Christ. Paul is talking of the danger of elevating people to something higher than they are and those who take credit for their special gifts and not give the credit to God who gave them the gifts in the first place.
- i) Paul's point is "let's see how much power these arrogant people really have". Let's see how much they can do in their own name as opposed to God's name. Let's see where the power is really coming from?
- ii) Does God use immoral people to lead others to Christ? Sure. None of us are perfect. I'll even argue God uses "non-believers" to lead others. It is not the fake "acts" of the nonbeliever or the "spiritually weak" that lead others to Christ, but the faith of the one who just got saved.
17. Verse 16: What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?
- a) The Christian church in Corinth had problems. We get hints of the problems in the first four chapters, and a description of those problems will become more blunt over the next several chapters. Given those problems, Paul asks this question, " Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?"
- i) I don't think Paul meant he physically wanted to beat the offenders in the church.
- ii) Remember in the last few verses, Paul said he did not plan on returning to Corinth in the near future. This verse gives the impression that it was Paul's intention to return literally one day and "figuratively" in that Paul was sending Timothy to check on the status of the church and Paul's next "response" would be based on what Timothy reports back to Paul.

- b) What Paul wants is for Christians in Corinth and Christians everywhere for that matter to grow in their relationship with Jesus. Paul wants all of us to be mature believers. The idea of the "whip, love or gentile spirit" is Paul is wondering how he should react next based on the negative reports coming out of this church.
    - i) Remember that Paul thought of himself as a loving father to this church in that Paul planted the seeds (i.e., led the first converts). Paul cared deeply about this church and wanted to see it grow and prosper. A loving father needs at the appropriate time (figuratively speaking) applies the whip, or shows a gentile spirit. The point is Paul, like a good father, is willing to do whatever it takes to see the church grow and prosper. A good father first, wants his children to learn right from wrong, and then to show love second.
  - c) With all of that said, the closing line is a question to the church in Corinth that "You have problems that have to be dealt with. You in Corinth are still Christians, but are not living a life pleasing to God. I want you to deal with this yourself. If you are not capable of dealing with it, I am going to step in and deal with it."
    - i) With that said, Paul wanted to come back to Corinth as a loving father. Still, he wasn't afraid to apply discipline if necessary. The growth and health of the church is far more important than showing love to the believers. May all of us remember that when we spend time with other Christians.
18. Chapter 5, Verse 1: It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.
- a) In the previous verse, Paul asks the question, "Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?" Apparently one reason Paul asked that question is that there are other problems in the church other than the faction issue mentioned in Chapter 1.
  - b) Here in Chapter 5, we learn of another problem: A Christian in that church is having sexual relations with his father's wife. This means it is his stepmother and not his mother.
  - c) The first issue I should bring up here is the "law" and Christians. The Old Testament is full of laws and rules on how to live a life pleasing to God.
    - i) The New Testament clearly says we as Christians are not under the law. (See Galatians 5:8). A Christian is not saved by living in obedience to God's laws.
    - ii) With that said, someone who is saved, wants to please God in all that do. As Christians, we have made a commitment to turn our lives over to God. That means we desire to please Him in all that we do.
    - iii) God's laws are still His standard for right and wrong living. In that sense, God desires we obey His laws in order to please Him, not to gain salvation.
    - iv) As to "which laws", the New Testament is our guide on those laws. There are some sections like the "food laws" which are clearly for Jews only and Jesus declared "all foods clean". On the other hand, such laws such as stealing and murder are clearly still "on the books".
    - v) Here in Chapter 5 the issue is brought up of the "sexual laws" as listed in Leviticus Chapter 18 and elsewhere. These are a whole list of laws of who we can and mostly about whom we cannot have sexual relations with.
    - vi) Among that list is the prohibiting of sex with one's father's wife. (Leviticus 18:8).
    - vii) Can one commit one of these sins and still be saved? Yes. Remember these sins are not binding for salvation, but they are binding in terms of how God wants us to live our lives.
  - d) Back to the text, notice the man who has his father's wife is condemned in this verse, but not the step mom. Most commentators suspect the woman is not saved and that is why she is not singled out for being at fault. God does not expect us to hold nonbelievers to the same set of standards as believers and that is why the stepmother is not condemned.

- e) With all of that said, the focus of this chapter is not so much on the sinning son, but on the church in Corinth. The main point of this chapter is that the church in Corinth should not tolerate such a sin, and should kick the guy out of church until he repents of his sin.
  - f) I should comment on the expression, "kind that does not occur even among pagans". As sinful a location as Corinth was, even they as a society did not tolerate the idea of a man sleeping with his father's wife. There are ancient Greek writings condemning this idea.
19. Verse 2: And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?
- a) The church in Corinth was "proud" of the fact they tolerated this sin. They correctly understood that this man had eternal salvation despite his sin. Therefore, they thought it was acceptable to tolerate the sin and let it go.
  - b) Christians need to have a balance of not tolerating sin, but at the same time not prying into people's lives and condemning each other. No person is perfect and that includes Christians. We are not to pry into people's lives to find sins. At the same time, when a sin does become obvious, the church is not to ignore that sin issue.
    - i) The big question with sin in the church is "Are people confessing it as wrong?" If a Christian is battling a sin issue, and they know it is wrong and they are making an effort to battle that issue, that is not a reason to kick someone out of a church.
    - ii) The issue is a Christian who refuses to repent and still wants to be in that church.
  - c) The sad issue today is too many Christian churches tolerate sins as listed in the bible in the name of "love" and never discipline that person. It is one thing for society to tolerate such sins and it is another for the church to put up with it.
  - d) In Matthew 18: 15-17, Jesus lays out a three step plan for dealing with sin in a church. Essentially it is 1) Approach the sinner one on one. 2) If the sinner fails to repent, go to the sinner again with at least one witness. 3) If the sinner fails to repent at that point, tell it to the whole church so the church can kick him or her out for not repenting.
20. Verse 3: Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present.
- a) As the founder of this church, Paul considered himself a member of that church and has already past judgment on him. Did this mean Paul ignored "Matthew 18:15-17". No, it means we are past that point. The sin is well known in this church and it is known the man refused to repent of this sin. Paul's point is this guy is already on "Step 3".
  - b) At the same time, because Paul was not there, he expected the church in Corinth to deal with this issue by themselves and do what Jesus commanded them to do.
21. Verse 4: When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, <sup>5</sup> hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.
- a) In Verses 4-5, Paul is urging the church in Corinth to bring up this issue in church and to expel the man from the church.
  - b) When the text says, "hand the man over to Satan", it does not mean to kill him. It means to kick the person out of the church. The New Testament clearly teaches that Satan is the ruler of this world until Jesus comes back. The idea is to let the sinner live with his sin in the world until he decides to repent. In the meantime, he is not to be allowed in church.
    - i) If this man is truly saved, he will be miserable to be "alone" with his sin. Taking away the man's "fellowship" with other believers will hopefully drive that man away from his sin and back to the church.
    - ii) At the same time, the church should be willing to welcome him back with open arms once he has repented of that sin.
  - c) Jesus clearly taught that the "church" is given the power to decide who should and who should not be a church member in Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18. Only God can read people's thoughts and therefore the "salvation" issue is up to God.

- i) As to who can and who cannot be a part of a Christian church, the church is to decide. The guidelines of who can and who cannot fellowship with us is based on obedience to God with the sexual purity example being used in this chapter.
22. Verse 6: Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? <sup>7</sup> Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.
- a) Remember the focus of the chapter is not so much on the guy who sinned, but on the fact the church in Corinth was "tolerating" this sin. Verse 6 says they were "boasting" in it. The mistake many Christian churches make is they tolerate sin in the name of love instead of dealing with it and telling that person to repent or be kicked out of the church.
- i) The big issue in today's world has to do with homosexuality. If a person was involved in homosexual relationships prior to being a Christian, they should be allowed in the church as long as they have repented of that issue and they are doing their best to turn from it.
- ii) Groups that argue for homosexuality say that Jesus never personally condemned that practice. Well, Jesus never personally condemned a man sleeping with his stepmother either. It doesn't make it right.
- b) Christians are not to hate nonbelievers involved in any sort of sexual sin. If Christians have no contact with nonbelievers, how are we ever to spread the Gospel message? We as Christians are not to hold nonbelievers to the same standards of the church. At the same time, Christians are not to change their own standards to conform to the world around them. That's a key point of this chapter.
- c) From the second sentence in Verse 6 through Verse 8, Paul is comparing the attitude of the Christian church on "sin" to the Jewish ritual known as "Passover".
- i) In order to remember how God lead the Jews out of Egypt, there is an annual Jewish festival called Passover. The main point of Passover is for the Jews to remember they were redeemed as a people.
- ii) Jesus himself celebrated Passover and that was the "Last Supper".
- iii) The Christian church is not expected to keep Passover. Many Christians of Jewish decent do keep the Passover for a different reason: To remember that God will still keep His unconditional promises to the nation of Israel.
- d) Without getting into a major theological lecture on Christians and Passover, let's focus on the text itself and Paul's point of bring it up: Paul is not calling on the church to observe the Passover ritual. Paul is saying that just like the Jewish ritual of not eating yeast as part of the Passover meal, so Christians should remove the "bad yeast" from the church.
- i) OK, what is yeast? Yeast is an ingredient put into bread to make it rise. Yeast is also called "leaven" in many translations. Yeast is symbolic of sin.
- ii) Yeast grows by puffing up. Sin grows when we get puffed up in pride and want to do things our way. The point is yeast and sin grow if they are left unchecked.
- iii) Part of the Passover ritual for a Jewish family is to get all of the yeast of the house prior to the meal. One of the origins of "spring cleaning" is the removal of yeast in that the Passover ritual is in the spring.
- e) In Verse 7, Paul calls Jesus "Our Passover Lamb". The point is Jesus has been sacrificed for our sins, and therefore the ritual of slaughtering a lamb as a symbolic act of forgiveness is no longer necessary. That is why the Christian church does not practice the ritual of Passover. Again, I don't have a problem with Jewish-Christians celebrating Passover, as long as they understand the ritual is not for the forgiveness of sins, but to remember how God has rescued the Jews from slavery and God still is going to keep His unconditional promises to the Jewish nation.

- f) In the same way, God calls Jews to clear the bad yeast out of the house, so Paul is urging the Christian church to clear the bad yeast out of the church. We are back to the point that the church in Corinth should have kicked this guy out until he repents of his sin.
  - g) Verse 8 then says, "let us keep the Festival". It goes on to say with to keep it without the old yeast, but to eat it with unleavened bread.
    - i) Some argue Paul is being literal, but it is hard to argue that given the context of the surrounding passage. Paul is obviously talking about keeping the church pure from sin. For the Christian, we observe Passover "every time we get together" in that the focus of our worship is the gratitude of Jesus dying for our sins.
    - ii) Like the Israelites who have been redeemed out of Egypt, so we have been redeemed from our sins by Jesus paying the price for those sins. In that sense, we as Christians celebrate the "Passover" all the time. It is not necessary for us to do the formal meal ritual of the Passover as we remember Jesus paying the price for our sins and that is our method of redemption.
    - iii) If a Christian group wants to observe the Passover ritual, I don't have a problem with it, as long as they understand the proper perspective about our redemption. My point here is that it is not a requirement for a Christian to observe this ritual.
  - h) The main point Paul is trying to teach is that in the same way a Jewish household is to remove all the symbols of sin prior to the Passover meal, so the Christian household i.e., the church should remove the un-repentant sinner from its midst.
    - i) New question: What if we kick a sinner out of our church and that sinner goes and joins the church down the street? In a sense, it is now the problem of the church "down the street" to deal with the guy. If we know people in that church down the street, we may tell them why he was kicked out, but still, that person is no longer under our domain.
    - j) Remember the main point of this 12-verse section of the letter is to teach the church how to deal with unrepentant sin in the church. It is not about every Christian being perfect. It is about sin that is not confessed as being wrong and the church tolerating the sinner who refuses to repent.
      - i) Once in a while, you will find churches that are "too tough" on sinners in that they refuse to let people back in after they have confessed it as sin and are now making an effort to turn from the sin.
      - ii) I find most often, churches tend to ignore sin problems hoping they just go away on their own, or hoping the whole congregation doesn't find out about it. The elders of the church must deal with such a problem once it is known to them. Again, Matthew 18:15-18 lays out the model of how to deal with such sin.
      - iii) What if it is the head pastor or one of the elders of the church involved in this issue? The solution is the same. If there is one thing I have learned from Paul is that the head guy in the church is just as accountable to God as the lowest member of the same church.
23. Verse 9: I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.
- a) In these three verses, Paul is expanding on the concept of who to, and who not to associate with as a Christian. The idea is much bigger than just a person who is sexually immoral. The idea is not to associate with those are wicked and especially those who call themselves a Christian but engage in activities that are condemned by the bible.
  - b) Paul's first key point in these verses is that a Christian is not to associate with people who are immoral, greedy or idolaters. When Paul means "associate", he means not to have any dealings with them.

- i) Now what if a family member falls into one of these categories. We may be friendly with them and demonstrate with our lives how we don't want to follow such practices, but our association with them should be limited.
  - c) Like most Christians, I have unsaved relatives and people I know. I am still friendly to such people, but I know there is a limitation to how much influence I let myself have in with their lives. It means we say "no" when asked to join in their activities.
  - d) The end of Verse 10 says, "In that case you would have to leave this world". That term "world" as used in this phrase refers to the world of Christianity. Essentially what that phrase is saying is, "If you or I as a Christian get involved with these activities, we should no longer be part of the church as we are now back in the "world's" way of doing things.
  - e) The essential idea is a way we are a witness to the world around us is based on our behavior. If nonbelievers don't see anything different about our behavior, then there is no reason anyone would want to be a Christian. One thing the Holy Spirit does it convict non-believers that their sinful lifestyle is wrong. Many people ignore that "feeling" in them and continue in their sins. My point here is only that our lifestyle should reflect our belief in God and our desire to please Him with our lives.
  - f) The next part of the text tells us not to associate with people who call themselves Christians but willfully choice to engage in a sinful lifestyle. It is one thing not to be a Christian in the first place. We can't expect nonbelievers to live as Christians live. It is another when someone claims they are a believer and don't "walk the walk".
    - i) Paul lists a handful of sins in these verses: "Sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler". This is not meant be a complete list of "bad sins". They are simply obvious examples of things to be avoided.
    - ii) As I've stated in previous lessons, we are not to judge people based on whether or not they are saved. At the same time, God does call on us to judge behavior. If we observe the behavior of people who claim they are Christians, and their actions don't follow their words, we are not to associate with such people.
  - g) Paul's final sentence in this text says, "With such a man do not even eat."
    - i) In the culture of that day, to eat with a person is to be "one with them".
    - ii) Let me give some thoughts on how to obey this idea: If we are in the business world, if possible, we should not eat our lunches with such people. Sometimes it cannot be avoided. God is well aware of that and will judge our lives accordingly.
    - iii) What about eating with family members that are not saved? Again, use good judgment here. Sometimes, those situations cannot be avoided. The main idea is for Christians not to be influenced by the lives of nonbelievers.
    - iv) For the most part I have learned to "eat who I want to eat with and work who I want or have to work with" and I have learned to separate the two. There are situations where it is necessary to eat with nonbelievers. This includes some business situations and family situations. I believe Paul understood that.
    - v) The context of this sentence is about not eating with people who can lead us down the wrong path in life. It should be read in that context.
24. Verse 12: What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."
- a) The final thoughts are on who we are and not are to judge. As I've stated in this lesson, God gives us the privilege, the ability and the duty to judge those in the church. It does not mean we judge their salvation, but their behavior. Again, one has to have a balance between not "prying" and at the same time dealing with issues that come up.
  - b) As to the behavior of nonbelievers, that is not the job of the church. God will judge nonbelievers and we are to stay out of that area. That does not mean Christians cannot vote and try to make society the best it can be. It does mean that we should not hold nonbelievers to the same standards as the church.

- c) The final thought is similar to one already taught in this chapter, "Expel the wicked man from among you". The point is if there is an unrepentant sinner in the church, we are to follow the Matthew 18:15-17 model and treat them accordingly.
25. Let's pray: Father, Help us to look to You for guidance for our lives, and not ourselves or even other church leaders. Help us to remember that the purpose of gathering with other Christians is to focus on You and not ourselves. Help us to remember that all we have comes from You and not to take credit for our gifts. Further, help us to stay "pure" in our lives and not allow unrepentant sin in the church. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.