

Unit 2: Dealing with Problems in the Church (1 and 2 Corinthians)

Lesson 10 | February 2, 2025

Confronting Sexual Sin

Study Text

1 Corinthians 5:1–13; 6:9–20

Central Truth

A local church must lovingly confront a member engaged in unrepentant sexual immorality for the good of the individual and the local church.

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (KJV).

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will embrace biblical teachings about purity rather than accepting cultural norms.
- Students will choose to remain sexually pure.
- Students will show compassion, humility, and wisdom when reaching out to fellow Christians who are struggling with sexual sins.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Many Christians are uncomfortable when churches teach or lead discussions about sexual sin. Yet these messages are not new. Since its earliest days, the Church has been confronting sexual immorality and promoting God's view of sexuality.

Discussion Starter—There's Sex in the Bible?

Say: How many times is sexuality mentioned in the Bible? While the exact number would be difficult to determine, God created humans as sexual beings (Genesis 1:28). Multiple passages promote God-honoring sexuality, such as Proverbs 5:18–19 and Hebrews 13:4. The Song of Solomon celebrates marital intimacy, while entire biblical chapters define sexual sin and call for sexual purity (Leviticus 18; Proverbs 7).

Say: If the Bible speaks that often about a topic, doesn't it make sense to listen to what God is saying to us? Shouldn't we assess whether our actions and attitudes toward sexuality are aligned with God's Word? May we approach today's lesson with an openness to the Spirit's instruction.

According to a 2019 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, half of U.S. Christians say casual sex (“between consenting adults who are not in a committed romantic relationship”) is acceptable. Fifty-seven percent said sex between unmarried adults in a committed relationship is acceptable.¹ Sexual mores in the church are shifting, and ignoring this issue leaves believers vulnerable to temptation and the heartache sexual sin brings.

Part 1—Do Not Excuse Immorality Immorality Condoned

1 Corinthians 5:1–2

Say: After dealing with the issue of disunity, Paul moved on to address other issues in the Corinthian church. It hadn’t taken long for false teaching to find its way into the church. Some were teaching that salvation only dealt with the soul or spirit while physical behavior, such as sexuality, didn’t matter. These false teachings claimed that believers had freedom in Christ to indulge their physical desires with no spiritual consequences. But Paul used part of his letter to the Corinthian church to dispute these lies. ***(Play the Lesson 10 video about the first-century city of Corinth. You can download it for free at radiantlifecurriculum.com/resources.)***

In 1 Corinthians 5–6, Paul dealt with issues he had heard about in the church in Corinth, including a situation in which a believer was in a sexual relationship with “his father’s wife” (5:1, KJV). The *New Living Translation* reflects the traditional understanding that this man had either married or begun a sexual relationship with his stepmother. Presumably, the man’s father was out of the picture, either through death or divorce. Paul did not spell out the exact circumstances, since the church would have been familiar with the situation, but he described the sin as a form of sexual immorality that even people of the world condemned (verse 1). Paul was troubled by both the sin and the other believers’ reaction to it.

Paul held to the scriptural teaching that incest was strictly forbidden (Leviticus 18:8; Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20), pointing out that even pagans rejected such behavior (1 Corinthians 5:1). The believers in the Corinthian church should have been heartbroken by their fellow believer’s immoral actions and taken steps to discipline him. Yet they were proud of their tolerance and enlightenment, likely misguided by false teaching. Paul’s instruction to remove the man from the church (verse 2) would serve two purposes:

1. Believers would be reminded of the deceitful and destructive nature of sin and examine their own hearts. We all need to remember how God saved us from sin’s bondage so we can live in the freedom of His grace.
2. The man living in sin would repent and be restored, reminding the other believers of God’s desire to restore sinners to right relationship with Him. That is the ultimate goal of the Lord’s discipline.

Discuss

? Why do you think Christians often struggle to respond appropriately when someone in the church is engaged in ongoing sin?

? How can discipline be an extension of love and mercy?

Discipline the Sinful Believer

1 Corinthians 5:3–5

Say: Paul gave detailed instructions to the Corinthian church for dealing with the man's sin. The church was to discipline him—both for his own good and for the good of the church. The typical goal of discipline is not to condemn wayward believers, but to lead them to repentance and restoration. Yet this account shows that there is a line that, when crossed, requires removal from fellowship. Following this procedure moves a church back toward the moral purity God requires and warns other believers of the consequences of immorality.

Paul challenged the believers to remove the man from their fellowship because of his sinful lifestyle (1 Corinthians 5:2). Though Paul was not present among them, he still had a spiritual connection to this church as its founder. Acting in the authority of the Lord Jesus, Paul explained the church was to call a meeting and expel the man from their fellowship. The hope was that he would experience the godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:8–10).

Paul underscored the source of the church's authority to take this action. Christ is the Head of the Church, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The church in Corinth was to act under the authority of its Head and under the leadership of the Spirit. The man in this situation had not simply slipped up, giving in to temptation. Instead, he had chosen to engage in an ongoing sexually immoral relationship. If he were allowed to continue in his sin and remain in fellowship with the church, his salvation would be at stake, he could lead others astray, and he would dishonor the church and the name of Christ.

The instruction concerning delivering the man “unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (1 Corinthians 5:5, KJV) has been understood by some to mean the man would suffer physically due to his sinful behavior, which would lead him to repentance. Another understanding is that it just means expelling him from the fellowship of believers. This would move him from the sphere of godly community to the sphere of Satan, which is ungodly community. This expulsion would ideally lead to repentance and re-inclusion into the Christian community. However one interprets this phrase, it is clear the motive behind the disciplinary action is restoration to a right relationship with the Lord and fellowship with the church.

Even today, the goal of church discipline is restoration, not condemnation. Some people reject the idea of church discipline, viewing it as cultish control and judgment. Others who place great value on personal freedom see it as unloving and condemning. However, Christians should view church discipline through the biblical lens of the nature of sin and the life-changing power of the gospel. Sin results in destruction and death. But the gospel changes people by the power of God so they sin less as they are

transformed into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:16–18). Discipline is motivated by concern for the wayward believer and the witness of the church.

Resource Packet Item 1: Dealing with a Wayward Believer

Students will read Scriptures that offer instructions for dealing with believers who are struggling with ongoing sins and then reflect on the purpose and process of church discipline.

Discuss

- ? How can a believer's ongoing sinful lifestyle affect the witness of the church?
- ? What steps can believers take to avoid habitual sin?

Part 2—Purify the Church

Immoral Believer

1 Corinthians 5:6–8

Say: The gospel is the life-changing power of God through the sacrifice of Jesus. When people put their faith in Jesus, He changes them from the inside out so they can live to please God. Instead of being in bondage to sin, believers are set free to follow God according to the truth of His Word. However, the church in Corinth had apparently fallen prey to the teaching that God's grace was a license for sinful living. So instead of being heartbroken that one of their own was living in sexual sin, these Christians seem to have boasted about it.

Paul chided the Corinthian believers for forgetting what the gospel is all about: "Your boasting about this is terrible" (1 Corinthians 5:6). Using Passover imagery, Paul likened the destructive nature of sin to yeast. Just as a little yeast can leaven a whole batch of dough, unchallenged sin can spread throughout a church, causing other believers to justify their own sinful lifestyles. If the Corinthian church allowed the sinful man to remain in the church, others could be led to sin and the church's purity would be compromised.

As our Passover Lamb, Jesus sacrificed His life to pay the penalty of sin on our behalf. His sacrifice brings people to life when they put their faith in Him. They become new creations in Him. Or as Paul explained, they are "like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast" (verse 7). Followers of Christ must remember that we have been set free. We are no longer slaves to sin but can live as the holy people of God. In verse 8, Paul called believers to continually celebrate this new life with sincerity (pure motives) and truth (pure actions). None of us is sinless. But because of our new life in Jesus, we should sin less. Our growing desire should be to please God in every aspect of our lives—heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Discuss

- ? How should the knowledge of our identity in Christ lead to holy living?
- ? Why do some Christians struggle with the ideal of Christian perfection?

Accept Responsibility for Fellow Believers

1 Corinthians 5:9–13

Say: Christians have a responsibility for one another. We are part of God’s family and the community of faith, which means we should care for each other and confront those who may be slipping back into sin. Yes, we should advocate for righteousness in society, but we also realize unbelievers will ultimately answer to God for their sin. We leave judgment of the wicked to God. But it’s different inside the church. When people in our church claim to be Christians but engage in habitual sin, God’s holy name is dishonored and our witness loses effect.

First Corinthians 6:9 indicates that Paul had written an earlier letter to the Corinthians, instructing them on interacting with people who engaged in sexual sins. This teaching was especially needed in Corinth, which was known for rampant sexual immorality, yet it seems Paul’s teaching had been misunderstood. Rather than telling Christians not to interact with immoral unbelievers—“you would have to leave this world to avoid people like that” (verse 10)—Paul told them to avoid interacting with people who claimed to be believers but lived sinful lifestyles (verse 11).

Paul’s command against eating with these self-proclaimed believers probably included any social setting, including the church’s regular love feasts. Sharing meals, particularly in those days, implied acceptance and camaraderie. Paul did not want believers to condone fellow Christians’ sin or be considered guilty by association.

Paul’s final comments about this situation were clear: God will judge unbelievers, but Christians have a responsibility to deal with believers engaged in ongoing sin. The goal is repentance and restoration. Paul quotes God’s command to the Israelites that they remove those who do evil from their midst (Deuteronomy 17:7). Based on this scriptural principle, Paul insisted that the sexually immoral man in the Corinthian church be removed from the fellowship.

Resource Packet Item 2: Discernment Needed

The church has a responsibility to remove wayward believers from Christian fellowship if they do not repent. The goal should always be repentance and restoration. Students will discuss the guidelines Christians should use when handling church discipline. This resource would work best as a group discussion.

Discuss

? How can Christians discern if an immoral person in the church is a struggling believer or a false believer?

? How can removing an immoral believer from church fellowship lead that person to repentance and restoration?

Part 3—Run from Sexual Immorality

Live as Changed People

1 Corinthians 6:9–11

Say: Paul had already challenged the attitude and actions of the Corinthian believers when confronted with sin in the church. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul questioned their understanding of salvation and the kingdom of God. Did they truly not grasp that unrighteous people aren't part of God's kingdom? Surely these believers could testify to the life-changing power of the gospel. After all, some of them had come out of sexually immoral and abusive lifestyles. Through Jesus, they had been cleansed of their sins and set apart to live for God. So why would they want anything to do with their old way of living? They were born again, changed by the living God.

Like the believers in Corinth, some people today think the rules apply to everyone but themselves. Perhaps it comes from the tendency to focus on God's love and mercy while downplaying His holiness and justice. But being part of God's kingdom requires living to please Him. Unless ungodly people are changed and made righteous through Jesus, they have no hope of entering the kingdom of God.

Paul's list of wrongdoers in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 may have been drawn from his observations while living and ministering in Corinth. The people engaged in these sinful lifestyles were lost, separated from God. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to be deceived, but to confront these sinful behaviors creeping into the church.

Verse 11 reminds us of all God has done for us through the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16). By calling on the name of Jesus and submitting to the Holy Spirit's conviction and guidance, we find salvation and learn to live as God's children. We must continually be mindful of the deceitfulness of sin. Instead of allowing sin to creep back into our lives, we must not justify or excuse behavior that does not please or honor God. Instead, we ask the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts and we respond humbly to His leading.

Resource Packet Item 3: My Testimony

Students will summarize their testimony—remembering all God has delivered them from—and think about ways they can use their story to lead others to faith and freedom through Jesus. This handout would work best as a take-home page for personal devotions.

Discuss

? How did your life change when you became a Christian?

? Why does ungodly behavior keep people from inheriting the kingdom of God?

Honor God with Your Body

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Say: Paul rejoiced in the life-changing, soul-freeing power of the gospel of Jesus. But the believers in Corinth seemed to misunderstand that freedom. Paul reminded them that freedom didn't mean doing whatever they wanted, risking a return to the bondage

of sin. Instead of living for momentary pleasures, Christians should honor God with their bodies by remaining sexually pure.

Paul wrapped up this section of 1 Corinthians by reemphasizing his main idea: Flee from sexual sin so you can honor God with your body. He refuted the argument some Corinthian believers seemed to hold that a person's body and spirit were not connected and did not influence each other. Some behaviors, even permissible ones, simply do not lead to good results. Perhaps Paul was drawing from Jesus' teaching that anyone who continues in a sin is a slave to sin (John 8:34).

God created people with bodies and spirits, so we are physical and spiritual beings. God cares about our bodies, as evidenced by the future bodily resurrection He has promised for believers (1 Corinthians 6:13–14). As such, Christians must honor God with our bodies. Sexual immorality clearly dishonors God, and its negative consequences affect both our bodies and our spirits.

Paul further argued that Christians become part of the body of Christ at regeneration—that a mystical, spiritual union is formed between believers and the Lord (verse 15). Sexual immorality tears apart a believer's spiritual intimacy with God.

If Paul were writing this letter today, he would have used bold, underlined, capital letters in verse 18: **RUN FROM SEXUAL SIN!** Engaging in habitual sin shows ingratitude for what God has done. He sent Jesus to redeem us from sin and to make us His own. He sent His Spirit to live in us, making us temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies belong to God, and we should use our bodies to honor Him.

Discuss

? What practical steps can believers take to flee from sexual immorality?

? How can Christians protect themselves from worldly influences that could lead to sexual sin?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Christians in the local church must lovingly confront those who are engaged in unrepentant sexual immorality for the good of the individual and the local church. It's easy to say; it's hard to do. We must start with a biblical understanding of sin, the human condition, and God's expectations of those who say they follow Jesus.

Unrepentant immorality of any kind in the life of a professing Christian should not be excused or tolerated. Fellow believers have a responsibility to deal with the offending Christian for that person's sake, the well-being of the local body, and the reputation of the gospel among unbelievers. The proper steps should be taken with compassion and care. The goal is for the sinning believer to repent and be restored to right relationship with God and the local church fellowship.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Embrace biblical teachings about sexual purity rather than believing and living by the norms of our culture.
- Make good choices that will help you remain sexually pure. Memorize Ephesians 5:3–5 to arm yourself against immorality.
- Take responsibility to help a fellow Christian who is struggling with sexual sin. Show compassion, humility, and wisdom, being careful to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Laws against Sexual Immorality.

Leviticus 18:19–30

Tuesday:

King David Judged for Sexual Immorality.

2 Samuel 12:7–15

Wednesday:

The Wisdom of Sexual Purity.

Proverbs 5:15–23

Thursday:

Avoid Adultery.

Matthew 5:27–32

Friday:

Abstain from Sexual Immorality.

1 Thessalonians 4:1–8

Saturday:

Live Consistent with the Gospel.

1 Timothy 1:8–11

1. Jeff Diamant, “Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex Between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable,” Pew Research Center, August 31, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casualsex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable/>.