



# Daily Bible Habit

## I Corinthians

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### Focus Points...*For I Corinthians 5*

#### Stop And Consider...

- \* How tolerant churches are at risk of being overcome by Satan's "yeast";

#### Look...

- \* At Paul's righteous anger and indignation that the Church would tolerate sexual immorality of the worst kind;

#### Listen...

- \* To Paul's stern warning to expel the brother and to avoid partnering with unrepentant, immoral brothers (cf. 5:9ff).

#### Prayer:

Lord, it's so easy to look at the early Church and think that their problems are ancient history. As I read chapter 5, help me to see today's Church—and the Church in which I belong. Help me to see the challenges of the Church. Give me insight and boldness to give passionate, but loving, testimony so that Your Church may aspire to be the holy Bride of Christ. Amen.

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#### Commentary:

First Corinthians Chapter Five begins with Paul demonstrating his vehement protest at the sexual immorality condoned at Corinth. Their immorality, he wrote, was "a kind that does not occur even among pagans" (5:1).

What was the most striking example of immorality among the membership? Someone was having sex with his mother-in-law, Paul reported, "And you are proud!" (5:2).

In Chapter Five Paul demonstrated the consequences of worldly wisdom. Those who seek the wisdom of the world will eventually succumb completely to the basest, most primitive and evil passions. In Corinth, those who proudly encouraged freedom in intellectual and spiritual pursuits proudly espoused and encouraged their sexual freedom as "enlightened" behavior.

The consequences of immorality within the Corinthian church were absolutely catastrophic. Outsiders likely thought that the Corinthian church was "St. Incest Christian Church." Why would non-Christians want to be a part of that? Why would the most responsive group of converts—the Jews, steeped in ceremonial

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cleanness—want to have any part of a church which proudly touted immorality and untold godlessness?

Paul, in Chapter 5:3, had already passed judgment—as he properly should have. Note how the public sin was so undeniably public and obvious that he called for the church to take a very public and expeditious “fast track” to church discipline. His command, Paul urged them “hand this man over to Satan,” with the full blessing of the Lord Jesus (5:4).

Could Paul have excommunicated the man himself? We don’t know. One thing we do know: Paul was not a pope. He was not an autocratic leader. He relied on the Body of Christ and partnered with the Church to carry out God’s will. This is demonstrated in this instance. Note how he commanded *the local Church* to expel the brother. It was *their* responsibility to do what was right in the Lord.

In expelling the evil brother, did Paul urge the Corinthians to bypass the first and second steps of church discipline outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18? Not really. Timothy and other leaders may have already confronted the sinner, so had others in the Church. The problem was that the entire Church lacked the resolve to do what was right. If not confronted—publicly, swiftly, severely and head-on—the church would split, scatter and die.

Though Paul’s command to expel the man was urgent and uncompromising, Paul’s intent was not to condemn the offending man to hell. He wrote,

“hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (5:5 [NIV]).

Though the time for steps 1 and 2 of Matthew 18 had long passed, the underlying purpose for church discipline had not been lost. The purpose for church discipline, as Jesus taught, was to show the sinner the severity of their sin. By confession and repentance, God’s grace would “destroy” the repentant immoral one’s sinful desires, grant them forgiveness and restore them to the kingdom. That’s the kind of ministry for which Paul stood. That’s the kind of principled ministry toward which Paul called the Church to live by—then and now.

From the beginnings of First Corinthians through chapter five, one notices the unleashing of Paul’s growing anger. In chapter five it comes to one of several climaxes found in his letter.

“Your boasting is not good (“noble”). Don’t you know a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?” (5:6).

The original Greek of 5:7, “Get rid of the old yeast” denotes a strong, urgent, compelling command “to radically and completely purge” the evil from among them.

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“Yeast” was anything that corrupted the teachings of the Kingdom and the lives of those in the Kingdom. During His ministry on earth, Jesus had often warned His disciples of the “yeast” of the Pharisees, Herod and others. In Luke 12:1, Jesus defined the “yeast” as hypocrisy. In other places Jesus identified “yeast” as the teaching of the Pharisees (Mt. 16:6).

What Paul meant by “yeast” in First Corinthians 5 is described in chapter 5:8.

“Keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of *malice and wickedness*, but with the bread of sincerity and truth” (NIV).

What was the Corinthian yeast? The “malice and wickedness” resulting from their arrogant pursuit and practice of worldly wisdom.

According to Acts 18, Timothy was at Corinth. Timothy understood first hand what was happening at Corinth. As the one charged with the oversight of the Corinthian Church, Paul warned Timothy about the Corinthian “leaven.”

“Don't have anything to do with *foolish and stupid arguments*, because you know they produce quarrels.” (I Timothy 2:23 [NIV])

“Foolish and stupid arguments,” that was the most pressing evidence of yeast at Corinth. By every measure, these foolish arguments—and those who engaged in them—undermined the Gospel and the fellowship in the Spirit God had given to the Corinthians.

How were Timothy and other ministers to deal with this “yeast”? Paul told Timothy,

“And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him, he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” (I Timothy 2:23-26 [NIV])

Paul's warning to Timothy also urged Timothy to carry out appropriate church discipline, even as Paul had instructed the Corinthians in chapter 5. No matter how severe the sin, the man of God must never lose the pastoral edge as he or she disciplines others for the sake of the Gospel.

No matter how severe the sin, the goal is always the same: if possible, win the erring brother or sister back to the Lord.

Was the problem of “wisdom” confined only to Corinth? Unfortunately not! There is evidence of this in Colossians and other letters as well. Whatever the yeast, the frustrations for Paul and other ministers were the same. To the Galatians, whose “yeast” was the infiltration of Judaism, Paul wrote,

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“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?” he wrote in Galatians 5:7 (NIV).

Paul had the same sort of frustration at Corinth. The Corinthians had started running a great race. But, by allowing the “yeast” which Satan planted in their midst, the Corinthian church was in the throes of death. Like the seed choked by weeds in Jesus’ parable, the Corinthians were gasping for survival. Their survival, as Paul saw it, was in no way guaranteed. Something had to happen—and fast!

The final words of Chapter five, underscore this urgency as Paul repeated what he had commanded earlier in chapter five (v. 6): “Expel the wicked man from among you!”

The Corinthian Church’s problem was one of tolerance disguised as “wisdom.” That same “yeast” is also in today’s churches. Without the spiritual and moral fortitude and confidence in God’s wisdom, without strong pastoral leadership and a laity willing to stand up for God’s principles, the contemporary culture stands ready and willing to choke Christ’s Church today even as it did in the first century.

**Prayer:**

As I look at Your Church, Lord, I see many weaknesses. We know Satan will do all he can to destroy and undermine the Church. The only way he can succeed, however, is if people like me let him. Keep my ignorance, my weak-will and my lack of resolve from moving forward to remove the “yeast” and expel the immorality. Help today’s church to boldly confront evil and immorality wherever it exists. Lord, use me—as You used Paul, Timothy and others—to be Your instrument in Your Church. Amen.

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