

First Epistle to the Corinthians

9 – Essay Two: Sex – Three Roadblocks (2.1b)

1 Corinthians 5:6b-6:8

1. Organizational options for this text
 - a. *ESV Study Bible*
 - i. A Report of Sexual Immorality and Legal Wrangling (5:1–6:20)
 1. Incest, arrogance, and the need for discipline (5:1–13)
 2. Trivial cases before unrighteous judges (6:1–11)
 3. Sexual immorality and the body's resurrection (6:12–20)
 - b. *Reading the New Testament: 1 Corinthians*
 - i. A: Separation for the Sake of Salvation : Sexual problem (incest) (5:1-13)
 - ii. B: The Costs of Going to Court: Problem of lawsuits (6:1-11)
 - iii. A': Keeping the Bedroom Attached to the Rest of the House: Sexual problem (fornication) (6:12-20)
 - c. *New International Commentary, New Testament: The First Epistle*
 - i. In Response to Reports (1:10-6:20)
 1. Immorality and Litigation: Test Cases of the Crisis of Authority and Gospel (5:1-6:20)
 - a. The Case of the Incestuous Man (5:1-13)
 - b. A Case of Litigation (6:1-11)
 - c. On Going to the Prostitutes (6:12-20)
 - d. Bailey¹ (Essay Two Subject: Men and Women in the Human Family)
 - i. Immorality and the Church (4:17-6:8)
 - ii. (Three Road Blocks: Leaven, Immorality, and the Law Courts [5:6b-6:8])
 - iii. Theology of Sexual Practice: Kingdom Ethics (6:9-12)
 - iv. Theology of Sexual Practice: Joining the Body (6:13-20)
 - v. Sexual Practice in Harmony with the Gospel (7:1-40)
2. Review of 4:17-5:6a
 - a. Modern readers tend to zero in on sexual immorality as the main issue
 - i. Problem of “incest” – permanent, sexual relations between son and step-mother
 1. Father is no longer married to step-mother (deceased or divorced)²
 - ii. Roman and Jewish laws and traditions forbid this relationship, though Romans often turned a blind eye to this type of relationship
 - b. Big issue in Paul's mind is arrogance and lack of community accountability
 - i. A powerful and vocal group within the church condones this relationship because they are now “free” to do whatever they want – no laws or tradition binds them
 - ii. A larger, silent portion of the church has done nothing – afraid, perhaps
 - iii. Paul condemns behavior of all three parties – they are all complicit
 - iv. The arrogant are particularly at fault because they exercise their coercive powers to silence those who would dare disagree
 - v. The silent are at fault because they fear the power of men over the power of God and have failed to take responsibility for their community

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 1777

² However, the alternate scenario in which the father is alive and still married to the step-mother is a viable option put forth by scholars, including Bailey (loc. 1935). When followed, this scenario presents a different set of issues. I have chosen to follow the death/divorced scenario suggested by *Understanding the Bible Commentary* (entry 1 Cor. 5:1) and *New International Commentary: First Epistle* (entry 1 Cor. 5:1).

1. In Paul's culture: the community determines what is appropriate or not
 2. Paul's teachings on Christian freedom: freedom is not absence of restrictions, but the ability to do what is good (for community)
- c. Paul's directive
- i. The community must come together in a public meeting to shame the immoral man
 1. Paul's culture: Individuals do not know what is right or wrong
 2. Paul's culture: Shaming is the means by which the community communicates what is and isn't appropriate for them
 3. Paul's culture: Shame is a good thing – it means the community and its members have a conscience (individuals do not have a conscience)
 4. Paul's culture: When someone realizes they have brought shame to the community, their natural desire is to correct it by bringing back honor

Table 1: Bailey, location 1922

| Obstacle One: Leaven (1 Cor. 5:6b-8 ESV) | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. | Old leaven New Dough |
| 2 | For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, | Christ/Lamb Sacrificed Feast |
| 3 | not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice ³ and evil ⁴ , but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth ⁵ . | Old leaven Unleavened bread |

3. A Little Leaven

- a. Modern reading usually identifies "leaven" with the sexual immorality of 5:1. But is it?
 - i. Paul explains "leaven" in 5:8 – "malice and evil"
 - ii. Malice: "Much of the NT views kakia as a force that breaks or destroys fellowship"⁶
 - iii. Evil: note particularly the connotation of "plots"⁷
 - iv. The opposite of leaven, unleavened, is defined as "sincerity and truth" (5:8) implying transparency and harmony⁸.
- b. Is Paul's primary concern with leaven, or with the dough/bread?
 - i. "You" are "a new lump" – "You... are unleavened" (5:7)

³ *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary*. Noun: κακία (kakia), GK 2798 (S 2549), 11x. kakia means "malice, evil, wickedness," primarily in quality or baseness. Much of the NT views kakia as a force that breaks or destroys fellowship (Rom. 1:28- 29; Tit. 3:3). kakia denotes a single sin in Acts 8:22, but it must be repented of. Christians are to put off kakia (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1).

⁴ *Enhanced Strong's Dictionary*. g4189. πονηρία ponēria; from 4190; depravity, i. e. (specially), malice; plural (concretely) plots, sins:— iniquity, wickedness.

⁵ *Mounce's*. Truth: ... But truth is not only in statements. Paul uses that adjective alēthinos to describe God himself. The Thessalonians turned from idols in order to "serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). And because God is true, what God speaks is also truth; "your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). Not only is God true, but Jesus is "True" as well (Rev. 19:11).

⁶ See note 3.

⁷ See note 4.

⁸ Unity and oneness in Christ, the topic of Paul's first essay. (C.f., note 5.)

- ii. “Let us,” as the bread of Passover, “celebrate the festival... with the unleavened bread” (5:8)
- iii. Paul may be looking backwards to the first essay on unity and looking forwards to the fourth essay on Eucharist/Communion
 - 1. The idea of a single Church, represented by the “bread” of this essay
- c. More on the “bread”
 - i. Is it coincidence that Paul begins with dough and ends with bread?
 - 1. He considered the Corinthians immature (c.f., Essay One)
 - 2. At the same time he did not question their belonging to Christ (c.f., Essay One) – “You really are unleavened” (5:7)
 - 3. He continues the theme about bad attitudes (leaven) infecting the whole community (c.f., Essay One – strife, if left unchecked, will destroy)
 - ii. The “oven” is the cross of “our Passover Lamb” (5:7)
 - 1. Just as in Essay One, Paul sees the cross event as the one and only thing that will bring the Church into unity and harmony
 - 2. The cross of Christ is the wisdom that will mature the dough-y Church into bread
 - 3. The event that is seen as shameful and tragic, for the Christian, is a cause for celebration
 - iii. Once baked, the bread is safe from further contamination
 - 1. When the Church embraces the cross and lives out its meaning, Christ keeps her safe from evil infiltrating her
- d. Paul’s concern is that the Christian community behave in a mature manner
 - i. There is no “just a small thing” – problems will infect the entire community and everything must be dealt with in a timely manner

Table 2: Bailey, loc. 1944

| Obstacle Two: Associations (1 Cor. 5:9-11 ESV) | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|-------------|
| 1 | a | I wrote to you in my letter | | | I Wrote |
| | b | not to associate with sexually immoral people— | | | Not meaning |
| | c | not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, | | | |
| | d | or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, | | | |
| | e | since then you would need to go out of the world. | | | |
| 2 | a | But now I am writing to you | | | I Wrote |
| | b | not to associate with anyone | | | Meaning |
| | c | who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality | | | |
| | d | or greed ⁹ , or is an idolater, reviler ¹⁰ , drunkard, or swindler ¹¹ — | | | |
| | e | not even to eat with such a one. | | | |

⁹ Mounce’s. [4431] πλεονέκτης pleonektēs 4x one who has or claims to have more than his share; a covetous, avaricious person, one who defrauds for the sake of gain, 1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6,10; Eph. 5:5 *[4123]

¹⁰ Enhanced Strong’s. g3060. λοιδορος loidoros; from λοιδός loidos (mischief); abusive, i. e. a blackguard:— railer, reviler.

¹¹ Mounce’s. [774] ἄρπαξ harpax 5x pr. raveneous, ravening, as a wild beast, Mt. 7:15; met. rapacious, given to extortion and robbery, an extortioner, Lk. 18:11; 1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6,10 *[727]

4. Associations without and within the church (5:9-11)
 - a. There was an earlier letter (non-extant) which the Corinthian Church had misconstrued
 - b. Paul's concern in this set of texts is mission
 - i. Mission cannot be performed if the Church refuses to associate with the world
 - ii. Mission cannot be performed if the Church misrepresents Christ
 - c. Modern readers, again, tend to zero in on "sexual immorality"
 - i. It's mentioned three times – so it must be important, right? Maybe, maybe not.
 - ii. Remember that the sexual immorality referenced in this whole section is the tip of a much larger problem: arrogance
 - iii. None of this is to say that sexual immorality is *not* a problem, but it *isn't Paul's main concern*
 - iv. It may have been a large concern of the Corinthian church, in which it used that criterion (however she defined it) as a basis of whether or not to associate with non-Christians
 - d. Paul corrects the Corinthian Church's misunderstanding and misapplication
 - i. The Church's concern with morality and behavior should be *within* herself, *not without*
 - ii. Power, position, status, influence doesn't matter: *anyone* in the community of believers who is guilty of unchristian behavior must be called out (shamed, removed from community)
 - iii. List of vices – six of them
 1. Western rhetoric usually places importance on the first, unless explicitly noted that the order is reversed
 2. Roman/Greek rhetoric often used virtue/vice lists of five, with a sixth item summarizing the first. The five are not in any particular order, nor do they assume an exhaustive list. They are just five examples.¹²
 3. Take special note of "greed" with its connotation, "to defraud"
 4. Also note "reviler" which can also mean "abusive"
 5. If five-plus-one rhetoric is present here, then "swindler" is the summarizing concept
 - a. Has an intentional motive of defrauding and destroying (violently) – church destroying itself is a theme of this letter
 - b. Has the idea of extortion – the concept of arrogance and misuse of power – the theme of this essay
 - c. Paul's warning: don't have anything to do with crafty, slick, smooth-talking, manipulative, concerned-with-appearances, power-hungry "Christians"
 6. Paul uses different words, but similar ideas, when he returns to the Corinthian church's current behavior in 6:8, "But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!"
 - iv. "Not to even eat"
 1. Not about casual meals – this is about Communion¹³
 2. Communion/Eucharist was not a separate event or ritual – it was the Christian fellowship meal that happened regularly, perhaps daily in the early days of the church

¹² *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, loc. 1975.

¹³ Bailey, loc. 1962

- 3. Ties back to preceding verses about Passover and bread and its call for unity and removing the leaven
- v. Internal corruption (leaven) is far more insidious and dangerous than external influence
- e. Paul's concern is that the church community act responsibly so mission is not impaired
 - i. Freedom in Christ is not reckless living

Table 3: Bailey, loc. 1967

| Obstacle Three: Lawsuits (1 Cor. 5:12-6:8 ESV) | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1 | For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person ¹⁴ from among you." | You Judge |
| 2 | When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? | Not Courts |
| 3 | Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? | Not Know? Eternity |
| 4 | Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! | Not Know? Eternity |
| 5 | So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? | Not Courts |
| 6 | I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? | You Judge |
| 7 | To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. [Already a defeat for you To have lawsuits at all with one another] Why not rather suffer wrong ¹⁵ ? Why not rather be defrauded ¹⁶ ? But you yourselves wrong and defraud— even your own brothers! | Suffer Wrong Don't Wrong Others |

- 5. Lawsuits within the community (5:12-6:8)
 - a. Paul's culture: the community defines its boundaries – the community determines what is and isn't appropriate
 - i. Outsiders do not know the community; therefore, it is not equipped to adequately render judgment

¹⁴ The word "person" is supplied in all translations. "Purge the evil from among you" is a command given and quoted frequently in the OT [Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; Judg. 20:13]. In my opinion, the NT supplies "person" even though it is not present in the Greek text nor the OT references, because translators assume Paul's primary concern in this entire section is with the immoral man of 5:1.

¹⁵ Mounce's. Verb: ἀδικέω (adikeō), GK 92 (S 91), 28x. adikeō is used mostly in Rev. (11x) and in Paul's writings (9x) to denote doing wrong, harming or hurting another, or mistreating someone (committing injustice). Notice that adikeō (as well as its cognates) stands in direct contrast to dikaios ("just," 1465) and especially dikaiosynē ("righteousness," 1466).

¹⁶ Mounce's. [691] ἀποστερέω apostereō 6x to deprive, detach; to debar, 1 Cor. 7:5; to deprive in a bad sense, defraud, Mk. 10:19; 1 Cor. 6:7; mid. to suffer one's self to be deprived or defrauded, 1 Cor. 6:8; pass. to be destitute or devoid of, 1 Tim. 6:5; to be unjustly withheld, Jas. 5:4 *[650]

- ii. Roman justice delegated to communities¹⁷; i.e., Jews judged their own, in their synagogues (excepting matters central to Roman rule such as treason and capital cases) – thus it would be expected that Christians judge their own, particularly in matters of religion and morality
- b. Modern reading
 - i. Paul doesn't want the church to embarrass herself and damage her reputation by airing dirty laundry in public – thus the command to deal with it internally
 - ii. Therefore, quietly remove the offending individual
- c. Reality¹⁸
 - i. The public already knows everything going on in the church – privacy is a modern concept – we tend to read it into scripture
 - ii. The public expects the church to deal with her problems
 - iii. When the church resorts to outsiders to judge her problems, she is in effect saying, "I won't or can't deal with this problem" – by going outside the church's reputation is being destroyed – she loses honor, she is shamed
 - iv. By arrogantly asserting that her freedom means no responsibility, the church is identifying herself as a threat to Roman rule and order
 - v. A quiet removal won't do anything to heal the fractures in this church community
- d. Paul is admonishing the Corinthian Church to take responsibility – to act as a responsible member of society
 - i. Paul calls on the entire community to "purge the evil" from among them
 - 1. The church must act as one agreed
 - 2. Judgment and purging/shaming is not a private affair
 - 3. Coming together and acting as one voice will bring unity
 - ii. Paul tells the Corinthian church that they are equipped to judge
 - 1. Outsiders are not equipped to judge church members
 - 2. The church, as a whole, will judge the world and angels
 - iii. Paul shames the church in order to remind her of community responsibility
 - 1. Judge does not mean condemn or punish, but to define what is good and evil
 - 2. He sarcastically refers to their supposed wisdom and how they can claim to be wise if they can't even judge among themselves
- e. What is Paul dealing with here?
 - i. Sexual immorality (incest) of 5:1? Arrogance? Or lawsuits among believers?
 - ii. Sexual immorality was a symptom of arrogance. It appears that lawsuits, too, are a symptom (or result) of arrogance.
 - 1. Perhaps those in power in the church were refusing to listen to those who wanted to take action, or those who wanted to take action were too fearful to force the church to act.
 - 2. Maybe they thought it would be easier to get outside courts to act on their behalf
 - 3. It was wrong for those in power to either refuse to listen, or to instill fear so that no action would be taken

¹⁷ *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Entry for 1 Cor. 5:12.

¹⁸ Most commentaries take a different perspective: that Paul admonishes the church to handle matters internally so as not to air her dirty laundry among unbelievers, thus bringing a bad name onto the church (i.e., the usual reading). I base my view on my application of principles and concepts in *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*.

4. It was wrong for those who wanted to take action to bring in unqualified parties
- f. The Church is in danger of failing her mission
 - i. By fostering an atmosphere where divisiveness, arrogance, immorality, etc. are tolerated, where it seems to some that only outside intervention can solve their problems, the church is on the road to failure
 - ii. To seek judgment from outside the believing community is to invite an outside party to shame the church – the judgment handed down will not be in the church’s interests; i.e., wrong and defraud – might as well invite wronging and defrauding
 - iii. Problem: the church is doing this (wronging and defrauding) among herself
 1. Exact words are different, but motif echoes 5:8, malice and evil; and 5:11, greed and reviler and swindler
- g. Paul’s concern is that the believing community has so compromised herself that she has little power left to perform her mission
 - i. Wrong attitude: Someone else will take care of the problem
6. Misuse of these passages in modern times
 - a. Misunderstanding these passages (leaven, who not to associate with, the evil person) to refer primarily to “sexual sins”
 - i. Churches have developed a special category for “sexual sins”
 - ii. Violations are nearly unforgivable
 - iii. Individuals who commit sexual sins (as defined by a church) are treated as pariahs
 - b. Missing 5:10, where Paul writes that Christians are supposed to associate with immoral and evil people of the world; and missing 5:12-13 where Paul writes Christians have no business judging actions and motives of those outside the community of believers
 - i. Christians are often quick to condemn “sins” of those outside the church
 - c. Misusing 6:1-7 about not bringing matters of the church to outside courts; missing 5:13 where evil is commanded to be removed from the community
 - i. Not reporting criminal activities of church members
 - ii. Not understanding that law and justice was handled differently in Rome (preference given to communities), churches of today asserting ecclesiastical privilege over violations of civil and criminal laws of the State
 - iii. Attempts to “protect the church’s reputation” and/or “God’s reputation” by quieting offenses done by those in the church, particularly those in visible positions, moving offenders around, paying hush-money, etc.
 - iv. Appealing to claims of “reputation” and “don’t bring lawsuits” to prevent, coerce, and manipulate victims from exposing offenses and crimes
7. Paul preemptively dealt with three “excuses” that the Corinthian believers might have made
 - a. It’s a minor matter among just a few individuals
 - b. We’re free to do whatever we want
 - c. Someone else will deal with the problem
8. In Summary
 - a. Christian maturity includes developing community perspective
 - b. Christian maturity includes developing community accountability
 - c. Christian maturity includes developing community responsibility (esp. to deal with problems in appropriate ways)
 - d. The power of Christian mission is found in healthy Christian community