

Week 9 **LEADER** Discussion Questions

Text: 1 Cor 5:1-13

Icebreaker: Have you ever ignored or tolerated a problem or issue that only got worse over time? What happened?

1. Read this week's passage. What stands out to you from the text or from the sermon you heard Sunday?

2. The first two verses of chapter 5 are an abrupt shift to a tough topic! What was wrong about the response of the Corinthian church to what was happening?

We could say a lot...they tolerated the immorality, and they were arrogant and boastful (see also 4:7 and the repeated emphasis in the first 4 chapters on humility). They had decided to allow the behavior to continue rather than confront it. Some have speculated that the man may have been influential in the congregation. Perhaps he was wealthy or had some other form of status in the culture.

Application: What reasons can you think of for why people in a church like ours may ignore or excuse a problem of immorality that we instead ought to confront directly?

3. Verses 3-5 are hard to grasp, but here Paul directs the Corinthian church on how to respond. What is most clear from these verses about Paul's desired outcome for both the offender and the Corinthian church?

Paul wants the church to come together with a unified voice and response, under the authority of Jesus and with Paul's own authority as their "father" (from last week). Their unified action is to "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." It's likely that this means they are to remove him from their fellowship so that his blatant and repeated sinful behavior will cease. The desired outcome is that "his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." In other words, the action by the church is meant to remove him from fellowship of those who are holy into the realm outside the church (the domain of Satan), bringing the man to his senses so that he might repent and turn away from his rebellion as so be saved. The action of the church in this interpretation, then, is meant to be redemptive for the man.

Application: From these verses, what good things does the church miss out on when immorality is ignored or tolerated within it?

In short, the church misses out on the opportunity to express its faithfulness and commitment to holiness as well as initiating a process that is meant to lead to

repentance. The offending person misses out on being confronted by sin so that repentance and salvation might occur.

4. Paul refers to Old Testament imagery in verses 6-13 to explain the “why” behind his instructions. How would you summarize what he says?

This is loaded with imagery from the Passover in the book of Exodus. Leaven (or yeast) was excluded from the Israelites bread to signify the kind of rapid response they needed to have as God brought about their deliverance. They didn't have time to wait for the leaven to do its thing! Given this literal background, leaven then took on a metaphorical sense of sinfulness. It represented impurity. In a similar fashion, then, the impurity currently present within the Corinthian church is preventing the people from being able to participate in all that God desires for them. The “leaven” of this unchecked immorality is like a contagion spreading throughout the assembly of believers.

Application: As you think about Paul's words, refer back as well to 3:16-17. What do these verses suggest about how the church should be set apart in our world?

5. Paul clarifies a misunderstanding in verses 9-13. What difference does his clarification make?

First off, it's noteworthy that these verses tell us that 1 Corinthians is not the first correspondence between Paul and the church there. In a prior letter, Paul had told them not to associate with the sexually immoral, but they mistook him—or ignored him—thinking that he was prohibiting contact with everyone practicing immorality. He's clarifying that his instruction is against those who call themselves Christ-followers but who continue to embrace their immorality.

Application: What happens when we fail to make the distinctions Paul is carefully pointing out in these verses? Does this challenge your own understanding of how you ought to respond to others who are caught up in immorality? If so, how?