

# POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

## PUT AWAY THAT WICKED PERSON (1 COR. 5)

by Wade Webster

If Paul were writing to churches today, I'm afraid he would pen more letters of rebuke and correction like First Corinthians than letters of rejoicing and commendation like Philippians. Many congregations today are plagued with the problems that characterized the Corinthian church in Paul's day. They are immature, indifferent, and increasingly infiltrated with immorality. Sin is in the church and the saints are content to let it remain. The church is powerless to persuade and purify the world because it is not practicing its own preaching (Mat. 5:13). The lives of those on the inside mirror those on the outside (Rom. 12:1-2). Hopefully, studying Paul's message to the saints at Corinth will produce the same changes in us that it produced in them.

### AN AWFUL SIN

As you know, all sin is awful. Even the smallest sin, if we may speak of such a thing, cost Christ His life on the cross (Isa. 53:5-6, 8, 11-12). Furthermore, even the smallest sin, can cost us our souls at the judgment. "Every idle word" will be brought into judgment (Mat. 12:36 KJV) and "all liars" (including those who tell white lies) will be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8; cf. Jam. 2:8-10). Although all sin is awful, two things made the sin under consideration in this chapter especially awful.

### WHERE IT WAS

First, the sin was awful because it was in the church and not merely in the city. Paul said that it was "among them" (1 Cor. 5:1, 2, 13). The guilty party was one who was "called a brother" (1 Cor. 5:11; cf. Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:14-16). While sin anywhere is awful, it is especially awful among the people of God. In Ephesians, Paul wrote, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3-4; cf. Phi. 1:27). The private actions of the heathen in Ephesus were so shameful that Paul couldn't speak of them (Eph. 5:12); yet, the shameful actions of this brother were being talked about "commonly" (1 Cor. 5:1) or "everywhere" in Corinth (Zodhiates 1039). There is simply no way that the church at Corinth could plead ignorance relative to the presence of this sin in their midst. This brother, and the church that tolerated his sin, were giving an occasion for the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom. 2:24; 2 Sam. 12:14; 1 Tim. 5:14).

### WHAT IT WAS

Second, the sin was awful because of what it was. Paul identified the sin as "fornication" (1 Cor. 5:1) which is a general word that refers to "any sexual sin" (Zodhiates 4202). It encompasses a number of sins from premarital to extramarital, and includes sins against nature such as homosexuality (Rom. 1:26-27). Fornication among the

saints would have been bad enough, but the kind of fornication that was among them was "such" as was "not so much as named among the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul's statement is incredible when you consider that fornication of virtually every form flourished among the Gentiles (Rom. 1:18-32; Acts 15:20, 29; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5).

Nowhere in the Gentile world was fornication more prevalent than in Corinth. Essentially all of Corinth was a red-light district. Corinth became a byword for immorality and vice. Approximately one thousand prostitutes, dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, plied their pernicious, but profitable trade in Corinth. No doubt, countless sailors, merchants, and travelers who docked in Corinth visited the temple and engaged in this vice. Because the tawdry trade of these women was a major industry in Corinth, they were viewed by many as public benefactors. Their trade was not only profitable for them, but also for the temple and the city. Amazingly, it was all done in the name of religion, took place in a temple, and was considered an act of worship. Imagine being a Christian or trying to raise a family in that kind of city. Imagine being a preacher or an elder and trying to protect members from such a culture. As the book of First Corinthians shows, Paul had his work cut out for him. There must have been a constant pull for those who had come out of a background of fornication (1 Cor. 6:9-11) to go back to wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22). No doubt, this is the reason why Paul found it necessary to repeatedly warn them concerning fornication (1 Cor. 6:18-20; cf. 6:13; 2 Cor. 12:21).

The lives of the saints at Corinth, if followed, would have caused the Gentiles to lead lives of greater wickedness (Jer. 2:33; Ezek. 16:47, 51-52). It is truly a sad day when those in the world have higher standards and live better lives than those in the church. Yet, for a time, such was the case at Corinth. It seems that everyone was shocked by the sin, except for the saints. Because Corinth had a commodious harbor and sat on a major trade route, countless individuals passed through there. The potential influence of the church for good was phenomenal. Now perhaps, for the first time since her establishment, the church at Corinth was the talk of the town and had every eye on her; however, it was for all of the wrong reasons. The church at Corinth was the gazing-stock and the gossip of the Gentile world. The church that had condemned their sins (and their goddess) was now guilty of a sin deemed worse than those found among them. Oh, how Satan and his servants must have rejoiced (Mic. 7:8).

### AN ARROGANT SPIRIT

As shocked as Paul was by the awful sin among them, he was even more shocked by the arrogant spirit within them. As if the sin wasn't bad enough by itself, the

church had made it much worse by condoning it. By their continued fellowship with the impenitent fornicator, they were condoning a type of fornication that the corrupt Corinthian culture wouldn't name or mention (5:1). Likely, some of the influence of the church could have been spared if they had condemned the sin and corrected the sinner as soon as it became known. However, they had let the fornication fester until it was now front-page news. Why had the church been so slow to act? Perhaps, by determining why they delayed, we might discover why many congregations today are doing the same. From the start, the actions of the church at Corinth had been all wrong.

### THEY WERE HAUGHTY INSTEAD OF HORRIFIED

The saints should have been horrified over the sin, but they were haughty. Paul described them as "puffed up" with pride and set about to deflate them with the prick of truth (1 Cor. 5:2; cf. Num. 25). If you're familiar with the book of First Corinthians, then you know that this is not the first time that Paul had used these words to describe them (1 Cor. 4:6, 18-19; cf. 13:4). The Christians were now demonstrating the same arrogant spirit toward the fornication within the church (1 Cor. 5:2) that they had earlier demonstrated toward the factions that existed among them (1 Cor. 4:6; cf. 1:10-17). They were now demonstrating toward the fornication among them (1 Cor. 5:2). With great irony, Paul spoke of how they had "reigned as kings" in his absence (1 Cor. 4:8). They were acting like kings instead of as servants of the one and only King (1 Tim. 6:15). These brethren may have thought they knew better than Paul what needed to be done. They may have prided themselves in their tolerance. They may have reasoned that what this brother needed was "love" and "acceptance" rather than reproof and correction. Like many in our day, they may have also elevated privacy to an unhealthy and unholy position. Perhaps, they argued that what consenting adults did in their private lives is not the business of the church. Although all of these suggestions are plausible, it seems to me that they were puffed up in spite of this sin. They were so puffed up that not even a sin of this magnitude could humble them. Their inaction demonstrated that they were indifferent to what this sin was doing to this brother, his family, the church, and to Christ. Had they truly loved this brother, they would have rebuked and chastened him (Rev. 3:19).

### THEY WERE GLORIFYING INSTEAD OF GRIEVING

Instead of grieving, they were glorying; and, their glorying was not good (1 Cor. 5:6). Interestingly, the word "good" means "beautiful" (Thayer 322). Their behavior, like the sin in their midst, was ugly. Instead of being arrogant and glorying, they should have wept and "mourned" (1 Cor. 5:2; cf. Ezra 9:1-6; 10:1-6; Psa. 119:136; Jer. 13:17; Ezek. 9:4, 6). The word "mourned"

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refers to the type of mourning one would do at the death of a family member (Zodhiates 1138). Their brother was dead in sin and they were glorying. Thankfully, after this tear-stained letter from Paul (2 Cor. 2:4), they stopped glorying and started grieving (2 Cor. 7:7-11). Someone has correctly pointed out that all church discipline should begin with mourning.

Although absent from them, Paul had established the facts and had already judged the matter (1 Cor. 5:3). Shamefully, in contrast, they were present and knew the matter firsthand, but had not done as much. In their arrogance, the sinful brother was still among them and accepted by them (5:2). Although this kind of tolerance is praised in our world, and may have been praised in ancient Corinth, Paul condemned it. Please

note that Paul rebuked them for not having judged the matter (5:12). Not only is judgment right (if it be righteous John 7:24), it is required. When Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," He was not condemning all judgment. He was condemning hypocritical judgment (Mt. 7:1-5). Righteous judgments have to be made. It is amazing that brothers at Corinth were willing to go to law with one another over trivial matters (1 Cor. 6:1-8), but wouldn't judge the brother who was guilty of the awful sin of fornication. Paul instructed them to deliver this brother "unto Satan" (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). Since there are only two kingdoms God's and Satan's, the church was simply declaring to the world that this man was now back in Satan's kingdom (Col. 1:13-14; John 8:44; 12:31; 16:11; Acts 26:18). The purpose of delivering the brother to Satan was two-fold.

## TO DESTROY THE FLESH

Although some contend that the destruction of the flesh (5:5) had reference to some bodily affliction or disease that would come upon the man (1 Cor. 11:32), it likely had reference to this man's repenting and crucifying the flesh again (Col. 3:5). It was hoped that the painful consequences and bitter fruits of sin would bring this brother to his senses (repentance), as it did in the case of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32; Heb. 11:24-25). As long as this man's brothers and sisters in Christ were condoning his actions, there was little chance that he was going to do anything to change.

## TO DELIVER THE SPIRIT

The second aim of the discipline was so that this brother's spirit or soul might be saved at the coming of Christ (5:5). Loving our brother demands that we correct him when he sins and withdraw from him when he refuses to repent (Rev. 3:19; 2 The. 3:14-15). The deeds of this brother at Corinth were going to cost him his soul if he wasn't restored (Gal. 6:1).

Paul concluded this section by using a proverbial statement concerning leaven (1 Cor. 5:6-8; cf. Gal. 5:9-10). By nature, leaven puffs up. As the yeast digests sugar, carbon dioxide is expelled into the dough, causing it to rise. Paul was using leaven to picture the brother as a corrupting influence in the Corinthian congregation. As you probably know, the Passover Feast began on the fourteenth day of Nisan when the Passover lamb was slain and was followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread which lasted for seven days. Prior to the beginning of the feast, the Jews searched their houses by candlelight and put out all leaven (Ex. 12:1-18; Lev. 23:4-8; Deut. 16:1-8; cf. Zeph. 1:12). Since Christ, their Passover (and ours), had already been slain, the saints at Corinth were late in searching for leaven and putting it out. If they continued to let the leaven of evil exist unchallenged among them, it would exert its corrupting influence upon the whole lump or congregation. What exactly was the "old leaven" that was to be purged?

## THE SINNER THAT WAS IN THEIR MIDST

Many commentators argue that the "old leaven" to be purged out was the sinner that was in their midst. Those who take this position point out that the overall context deals with putting away the wicked brother (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 5, 13). For sure, evil companions can have a corrupting influence like leaven. Later in the letter,

Paul wrote, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). The word "corrupt" means to spoil or ruin in a moral or spiritual sense (Zodhiates 1442).

## THE SPIRIT THAT WAS IN THEIR MIDST

Other commentators suggest that the "old leaven" to be purged was the arrogant spirit that filled them and was keeping them from disciplining the brother. It should be noted that leaven is directly connected with their glorying (1 Cor. 5:6), being "puffed up," and not having "mourned" (1 Cor. 5:2). Obviously, Paul was writing these words of rebuke to bring the church to repentance (a change of mind/spirit). If Paul could get them to put away their arrogant spirit, then putting away the sinful brother would naturally follow. Like leaven and bad companions, bad attitudes also exert a corrupting influence. As you know, attitudes are contagious. Because of their arrogant spirit, they were becoming partakers of this man's sin and were falling under his condemnation (Rom. 1:32; 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 John 9-11; 1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Paul concluded his mention of leaven by contrasting "the leaven of malice and wickedness" with the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). They were presently the former (divided and defiled), but were to be the latter (united and undefiled) that they might keep the perpetual feast of Christianity.

## AN APOSTOLIC SOLUTION

The solution given in the fifth chapter of First Corinthians was not a human solution. It was apostolic and not human doctrine (Acts 2:42; Mat. 15:9). It was the result of divine revelation and not human education (Gal. 1:11-12; cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16). The human solution of leaving the sinner alone, which had been practiced by the church, was condemned by Paul (1 Cor. 5:2). The divine solution was to put the sinner away without delay (1 Cor. 5:13).

It is interesting that Paul had already written to the church at Corinth instructing them "not to company with fornicators" (1 Cor. 5:9). If only they had comprehended and/or complied with Paul's earlier inspired counsel, the church might have been spared much shame and reproach. Evidently, the saints at Corinth had applied Paul's words to the world, but not to the church. They interpreted Paul's command as forbidding any contact with the fornicators in the world, but allowing fellowship with fornicators in the church. You can imagine how the world must have viewed this inconsistency. Paul clarified his original command by pointing out that one would have to go out of the world to avoid all contact with fornicators and other sinners (5:10). Their interpretation contradicted common sense. Where could one go in Corinth without coming in contact with a fornicator? One would meet them in the markets and brush up against them in the streets. Paul was not condemning the common, compulsory contact inherent in everyday living. He was condemning social intermingling with anyone that was a fornicator. The word translated as "company" means "to mix together" or "to mingle together" (Zodhiates 1336). Therefore, when Paul told them "not to company with fornicators," he was telling them not mix themselves together with them. They were to be separate from them (2 Cor. 6:17-18). If all contact with fornicators

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- 7:00 PM - *Abithobpel: A False Friend With A New Testament Counterpart* ~ Gary McDade
- 8:00 PM - *Joab: David's Captain Who Had His Own Agenda* ~ B. J. Clarke

## MONDAY: JULY 28, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *The Man After God's Own Heart* ~ Keith Mosher, Sr.
- 10:00 AM - *David & Goliath: The Slingshot Heard Round The World* ~ Paul Sain
- 11:00 AM - *The House That David Longed To Build* ~ Dan Cates
- 1:00 PM - *David's Mighty Men: Courage Begets Courage* ~ Cliff Goodwin
- 2:00 PM - *The Shepherd's Psalm* ~ Kyle Butt
- 2:00 PM (Ladies Class) - *Bathsheba: Whose Bath Made A King Unclean* ~ Jane McWhorter
- 7:00 PM - *Amazing Grace: Mephibosbeth's Place At The King's Table* ~ Dan Winkler
- 8:00 PM - *Your Cheating Heart Will Tell On You/What David Didn't See From His Rooftop* ~ David Sain

## TUESDAY: JULY 29, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *The Spirit Of The Lord Spake By Me* ~ Eddy Gilpin
- 10:00 AM - *Nathan: Who Loved His Friend Enough To Tell Him The Truth* ~ James Rogers
- 11:00 AM - *Shemei: An Enemy With Whom David Showed Great Self-Control* ~ Curtis Cates
- 1:00 PM - *Murder, He Wrote: The Death Of Uriah The Hittite* ~ Jimmy Clark
- 2:00 PM - *The Kingdom That David Saw* ~ Eric Owens
- 2:00 PM (Ladies Class) - *Abigail: A Wise Woman Who Married A Foolish Man* ~ Sheila Butt
- 7:00 PM - *The Sin Of Counting Heads: When David Numbered Israel* ~ Larry Acuff
- 8:00 PM - *David's New Oxcart* ~ Gary Colley

## WEDNESDAY: JULY 30, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *When David Lost His Song* ~ Robert Jefferies
- 10:00 AM - *Sharing The Spoils: Remembering The Weak* ~ Gary Williams
- 11:00 AM - *I Just Can't Wait To Be King: Resisting The Urge To Run Ahead Of God* ~ Bobby Liddell
- 1:00 PM - *Solomon: The Son Selected To Succeed David* ~ Sam Wilcutt
- 2:00 PM - *Jonathon: Who Defied His Father For His Friend* ~ Jeff Clark
- 2:00 PM (Ladies Class) - *Michal: A Wife Whose Love Grew Cold* ~ Kathy Pollard
- 7:00 PM - *David In The Sheepfolds: Preparation For Greater Service* ~ Neal Pollard
- 8:00 PM - *Trouble At Home: Sin In David's Family* ~ Brad Harrub

## THURSDAY: JULY 31, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *Saul: The King Who Lost His Kingdom To A Neighbor Better Than He* ~ Chuck Webster
- 10:00 AM - *David Mourns For His Enemies: Saul, Abner, Absalom* ~ Randy Vaughn
- 11:00 AM - *David & His Harp* ~ Patrick Morrison
- 1:00 PM - *Thou Art But A Youth* ~ Robert Hatfield
- 2:00 PM - *Absalom: Heart-breaker & Kingdom-taker* ~ Kirk Talley
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- 7:00 PM - *The Sweet Psalmist Of Israel* ~ Tom Holland
- 8:00 PM - *My Servant David* ~ Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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## PUT AWAY THAT WICKED PERSON (1 COR. 5)

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had been meant, then Paul would have violated his own teaching because he founded the Corinthian congregation by coming in contact with and converting those who fell into these categories (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Paul did not want the church to be a monastery or a convent. He did not establish the congregation for that purpose. He wanted them to be salt to stop the decay of the city (Mat. 5:13). As you know, in order for salt to exert its influence, it has to come in contact with that which it is to season or preserve. In like manner, the church in Corinth had to come in contact with the sinners of the city in order to convert or change them. However, the ever-present danger of being changed and losing one's savor or influence had happened at Corinth. A brother had become corrupted and the church, for all intents and purposes, had lost its savor by tolerating sin in its midst. Like Jesus, Paul's prayer was not that they might be taken out of the world, but that they might be kept from evil (John 17:15).

Having clarified his earlier instructions in the previous letter, Paul now focused on the matter before him when one who is called a brother is "a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner" (1 Cor. 5:11). Although members of the same spiritual body were supposed to be mingled or joined together (1 Cor. 12:12-27; cf. 1 Cor. 1:10), this fellowship was conditional. If a brother walked disorderly, as this brother at Corinth was doing, fellowship was to be withdrawn from him (2 Thess. 3:6; cf. 1 Tim. 6:5). Notice that they were "not to eat" or to socially intermingle with this brother (Rom. 16:17; 2 John 11; Mt. 18:17). Eating with this brother would have been a declaration of friendship and fellowship (John 13:18; Mat. 26:50). It would have left this brother and the watching world with the impression that the church approved. By refusing this type of association, the church was declaring that they were ashamed of this brother's actions. Not only were the disciplinary actions of the church designed to minimize the shame brought upon the church, it was designed to maximize the shame brought upon the sinning brother (2 Thess. 3:14-15; cf. Mt. 18:17). It should be noted that church discipline is only effective to the degree that members personally disassociate themselves from the one disciplined. If the congregation as a body withdraws, but the members continue to fellowship socially with the brother, the discipline will not be effective. Those who continue to associate with the brother become partakers in his evil deeds and are in need of discipline themselves (1 Tim. 5:22; 2 John 9-11). No doubt, some today would go to those disciplined, and say, "I'm sorry that the church was so hard on you." However, there is a way that is far harder than the way of correction. The hardest way of all is the way of the transgressor (Prov. 13:15).

Evidently the stepmother, with whom this brother was

fornicating, was not a Christian. He is described as being "within" (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 12-13), while she is described as being "without" (1 Cor. 5:12; cf. Eph. 2:12). Since she had never been "within," Paul did not command them to put her away as he did the brother (1 Cor. 5:2, 7, 13). She did not need to be delivered to Satan as the brother did (1 Cor. 5:5), because she had never been "within" the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13-14; cf. Eph. 2:12). Since this woman was "without," Paul did not need to pass judgment on her as he did on the brother. She was condemned already (1 Cor. 5:12-13; cf. John 3:18). Lest someone conclude that the church was free to fellowship this woman, it should be noted that Paul's instructions in the previous letter would have forbidden them from doing so. They were not to company or intermingle with any fornicators (1 Cor. 5:9), including one who might be called a brother (1 Cor. 5:11). However, they were only to exercise discipline over the brother. Someone has aptly compared this to the brat in the cart in front of you at the grocery store. Although you want to give him a good spanking, you can't because he isn't your child. You can only exercise that kind of discipline over one in your own house.

Please note the word "therefore" in the thirteenth verse (1 Cor. 5:13). As you know, the word "therefore" signals a conclusion. As Paul draws his inspired instructions to a close, he leaves no doubt as to what the church is to do in reference to this brother. He wrote, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13; cf. Deut. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19-20; 24:7). Please note that Paul did not say, "Let him stay." He told them to put him away. The aorist imperative that Paul uses is sharp. There were to be no if, ands, or buts about this command. They were to act (Lenski 232). The wicked brother was to be taken away from among them (5:2), delivered to Satan (5:5), purged out (5:7), withdrawn from (5:11), and put away (5:13). Surely, such teaching is simple to understand.

As you know, this story has a happy ending. The book of Second Corinthians, which was written about six months later, records that both the disciplined brother (2 Cor. 2:5-11) and the church repented (2 Cor. 7:9-16). I am convinced that the same result can be achieved today. However, in order for that to happen, the church is going to have to repent of years of inaction and start practicing church discipline again.

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