



I find it very intriguing to me that in the Lord’s providence, he has chosen this Sunday for us to begin gathering together – and while I may never know why this text comes together with this Sunday, I can’t help but speculate why the theme is excommunication. This time of social isolation has been very difficult for many people. And, in the midst of this time, I can’t help but wonder if some people have drifted away from the Word and prayer. You’ve drifted from Christ. Some of you may be teetering on the brink and you may not even care where you’re at spiritually today. Others of you may feel the dryness and you’re feeling desperate. This chapter serves as a wake-up call to you (and to all of us) to get out of any spiritual amnesia we may be in.

Let’s be reminded about Corinth’s scenario. They believe they know what it means to not only be spiritual, but to be super-spiritual. They’ve evaluated teachers to know which is superior and ought to be heeded. They’ve judged others in the church as less spiritual, and (as we’ll see in this chapter), while they think they’re “good” spiritually. Then they point their fingers out at the world. As I thought about this, I realized it wasn’t so different from some church experiences of which I’ve been a part. People come on Sundays. They dress nicely. They talk on the surface before and after the service. They speak of God’s holiness and his demands. But no one knows how each other are really doing. People are in unrepentant sin, but without purposeful pursuit of discipleship, people live in their sins. All the while, the church rails on the culture out there and they speak against those Christians *out there* who don’t care as much about holiness as they do. This is such a “Corinthian” way of doing church. Focus on externals. Focus on a certain “model” of doing things. Have an appearance of godliness and you think you are godly. All the while, as you’re pointing your fingers as other people’s specks, you have a log in your eye. What’s forgotten in the midst of all of this? God’s glory in and through Jesus by the power of the Spirit. Salvation isn’t about making much of us, but realizing that in making much of God, we find our supreme joy. And, making much of God isn’t revealed through our strength, but in determining to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified – to elevate the sacrificial life and death of Jesus! If we are not living the cruciform life, we are not following Jesus.

In chapter 5 of first Corinthians, Paul now points out the log in the Corinthian’s eye. In doing so, maybe God will point out the logs in our own eyes as well. Now, let me share with you what I think the big idea of the text is: **A humble church must practice excommunication (when necessary) with mourning, judgment, unity, and severity.** I could simply say that a humble church must practice excommunication, but I’m adding those four components because they’re in the text for us.

First off, you might wonder what I mean by excommunication. Excommunication is not the same as church discipline. Church discipline should be happening all the time in healthy churches. In Matthew 18, when Jesus talks about church discipline, it’s in the context of interpersonal relationships. They’re difficulty and pain between two parties and yet the one Christian goes to their friend and shows them their sin. I’ve said this before and need to say again that in the church we should know each other so well that we could hurt each other. But in our responses, we want to help each other grow in godliness. This growth in godliness and spurring each other on is “discipline.” Discipline isn’t just a “spanking.”

Discipline is God's means of working through people to confront, challenge, encourage and exhort to pursue holiness in daily living. Every church is commanded over and over again in the Scriptures to live this way. Every individual in the church should be committed to live this way and pursue others so that they would follow the Lord. Don't simply wait for people to do this for you.

So, what is excommunication? It's not the goal of discipline. The goal of discipline is greater godliness. But, excommunication could happen within the process of discipline if someone doesn't want to be challenged in growth – when sin continues in their life and they don't care. Jesus states that the person is to be put out from church. Why? They may be saying they're a Christian, but their life isn't revealing it. Ultimately excommunication must happen because the church's concern must always be Jesus' glory and if the person isn't displaying Jesus' glory through them whatsoever (and they don't repent), then they cannot bear the name of Christian. They're not following Christ!

So, today's message is going to focus on the need to practice excommunication and also the "how" of excommunication. Let's dive right in and first get the backdrop of the Corinthian situation. This will help us to understand when excommunication ought to take place.

1. A humble church must practice excommunication when necessary (vv. 1-2).

Read verses 1-2 with me again: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you."¹

For many of you, you might jump into verse 1 and forget the previous verses in chapter 4. Paul just called the Corinthians to evaluate their spirituality. He's compared their view of the spiritual life with that of Jesus, the apostles, and Paul. The Corinthians are acting contrary to a Cruciform life – a life conformed around the cross of Jesus. The cross of Jesus is where Jesus took the punishment and pain of our sin on himself so that sinners could be reconciled. At the cross, Jesus loved his enemies and sacrificed for those who would turn to him in repentance and faith. Yet, the Corinthians have been evaluating spirituality from the lens of the Roman culture, not Jesus' death. Then Paul asks in verse 21: What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? ²

Immediately after that question he then moves on to a situation with a guy in the church and talks about excommunication. Wait. Where is this coming from?! We could simply think that Paul's moving on, but there's a word Paul uses that connects with chapter 4. It's the word in the ESV for "actually." If you mark in your Bibles, I'd encourage you to circle that word, draw a line and then write, "in short." Is Paul going to come with a rod or with gentleness? Here's the real test, Corinth. If you're really spiritual, wouldn't you address sin in your own midst? The Corinthians are busy pointing fingers at others. They're making spiritual the things that aren't – like we can with dress codes or other things. And they're ignoring the blatant sin in their midst.

If they were a godly church, they'd confront. But they could say, "Why should we confront this?" In the first two verses, Paul gives the explanation of why there should be excommunication. Let's look at these reasons.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 5:1–2.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 4:21.

Reason #1: Unrepentant sinning. At the end of verse 1, Paul says that the man “has” his father’s wife. The word “has” in the Greek is in a tense that is emphasizing the continuing nature of this relationship. The man has either married this woman or he’s continually engaging in sexual activity with her. Either way, he hasn’t stopped. This is part of what I mean by “unrepentant” sinning. Listen, the reality within our lives is that we will all continue to sin until the day we die. Some will battle harder and longer than others. The question is whether or not there is repentance.

Sadly, I remember in junior high being taught that repentance meant that you essentially tell God, “I’ll never do it again.” Repentance doesn’t mean you’ll never do it again. If that’s the case, then no one has ever repented because you still sin. Some will say, “Ok, but repentance means a change of behavior.” That’s partly true. But, repentance is primarily a relational term. Repentance means that you admit and agree with God about the sinfulness of your behaviors and attitudes and that you turn to him for both mercy and strength to love him more and fight against the sin. So, you can have someone who changes behavior, but they haven’t repented because they still don’t care about God. Or, you can have someone who says they care about God, but they keep going back to the sin without any real warfare. Are you in this camp today? Are there sins that you’re justifying? Or, are there sins you just won’t let go of?

Reason #2: Sexual sin. This man *has* his father’s wife. Now, what does that mean? This leads us into the second reason. Again, it’s not that this man has committed sexual sin once or twice or however many times. It’s that this man is in sexual sin and he’s not repenting. Remember this with discipline and excommunication. Don’t focus simply on the actions. Focus on the heart! Where is the person’s love?

Also, keep in mind that the church isn’t just supposed to discipline or excommunicate because of sexual sin. Later in this chapter, Paul brings up other sins because the point isn’t even only the sin itself. Again, it’s unrepentance – a heart that isn’t melted and moved by the Savior and refuses to submit and follow him. In this scenario we have sexual sin. And, I actually want to take the time to define sexual sin here. The Greek word used here is *porneia*. I’m finding it increasingly sad that professing Christians try to make arguments that this word doesn’t mean what it really means. They do it to justify their own sinful behaviors. I’ve heard people say that God never commands that sex outside of marriage is sinful. Someone may justify masturbation because the Bible never commands against it. What about homosexual practice, bestiality, pedophilia? *Porneia* includes all of these terms – and even more. One Greek dictionary defines this word as **“to engage in sexual immorality of any kind.”**³ **So, *porneia* is any sexual/sensual activity taken place outside of the context of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman.** Since the sexual union and sexual acts have a very specific purpose, to take it outside of the context of the marital union, you are abusing the gift. By the way, and I’m sad to say that I might have to add this here, I have heard people argue for pornography within the sexual union. It grieves and angers me that people do this. Sexual immorality is destructive. Since faithfulness in the marital union shines the gospel, any type of marital infidelity cuts away at the glorious picture of self-sacrifice as Jesus displayed in his life and death. No wonder sexual sin is taken so seriously in the New Testament. With the entrance of Christ and the gospel, we understand more of how sinful sexual sin is. Are you caught in sexual sin? I pray you’d repent! I pray you’d even open up with another believer in the church and say, “I need help.” Listen, if there’s repentance, there’s no excommunication. Instead, there’s loving exhortation, challenge and coming alongside. But if you remain in your sin, I’m deeply concerned for you!

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 770.

Reason #3: Sinning condemned by the world. Now we come to the final reason. Paul says in verse two that this sin is of a kind not even tolerated among the pagans. I mean, if you know anything about the Roman world in the 1st century, almost every sexual sin was tolerated. Pedophilia was tolerated by some. Homosexuality was tolerated. Temple prostitution as worship was tolerated. But incest was *not* tolerated. From the Roman perspective, to have sexual relations with someone in your family would destroy the fabric of society. Yet, here within the Corinthian church we have a man who's taken his father's wife. By the way, this is not referring to his mother. This is referring to a step-mom. This follows Old Testament lingo of a step-mother as well, like in Leviticus 18:7-8.

As I was thinking of a way to apply this to our day, I came up with a grievous example. Within the last ten years, many Christian organizations and pastors have been exposed as having covered up sexual abuses situations. For whatever reasons, the churches and Christian organizations thought they could handle in-house, but as a result, the abusers continued in their abuse and/or those abused never saw God's care for the hurt and abused. I'm thankful for organizations and churches who have come out to the light and confessed their sins (even my own University that I graduated from). But I'm grieved at how blind we as Christians can be of our own sins – making justifications for why we wouldn't confront a sin that even the world would say is heinous and ought to be prosecuted.

Listen, the gospel of Jesus is offensive to the world already, we must not create ungodly hindrances for people to believe the gospel! If they look at the church and say, "They do x, y, z sin that even I find horrible," we ought to be the first to repent and turn to Jesus for forgiveness and grace to grow. So, I have a question, is there a sin you're not repenting of (sexual or otherwise) that even the world would admit is wrong? Confess to the Lord. Talk to someone here. Let's grow together in pursuing Jesus.

So, here are the reasons for excommunication. Not all situations make excommunication necessary. But these situations do! Now, let's move on to the next point:

2. A humble church must practice excommunication with godliness (vv. 2-5).

I say "godliness" here, and what I mean is with mourning, judgment, unity and severity. Each verse takes each of these points. So, let's start with

With Mourning (v. 2). Verse 2 says, "²And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you."⁴ Some people want to make what I believe to be too much of the word "arrogant." Were the people saying, "We're free in Christ! Freedom means sexual relations like this"? I don't believe that fits the context because *only* one person is doing this. If they thought this was fine behavior, more people would probably be doing this. Instead, I think the word "arrogant" here is defined by the next two sentences. They're not mourning and not removing him from the church.

This fits with Paul's idea of the word "arrogant" in the previous chapter as well. **Arrogance is essentially leaning on your own understanding and your own way of doing things instead of trusting and obeying God.** They're arrogant because they're not living on the basis of Jesus and the gospel. The gospel says Jesus died for sinners in order to give them forgiveness, reconcile them to God and then to change them from the inside-out so they can follow after God. Since Jesus has done this for us, it's arrogant whenever

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 5:2.

we say, “I get what Jesus says, but I’ll do it my way.” When we live this way, we trample on the greatest sacrifice of all time! Don’t live this way, Ventura. May we never, as a church, live this way.

Instead, when there’s a need for excommunication, we ought to mourn. This word for mourn involves emotions as well as action. It’s not enough that the Corinthians would be sad about the man and his hard-heartedness. They must also act towards it. In Israel, a person who committed this sin would be stoned to death. Thankfully we don’t do that today in our churches. However, there is a different act God calls us to: remove the person. While that doesn’t sound as painful, there are spiritual dynamics to this that I think ought to cause us great sorrow and sobriety. If we have this attitude, we’re excommunicating out of love for God’s glory and even concern for the person in sin – not out of superiority. Secondly, excommunication is to be done

With Judgment (v. 3). Verse 3 says, “³For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.”⁵

Didn’t Paul say, in chapter 4, to not pronounce judgment before it’s time? Then here, Paul says that he’s pronounced judgment (same wording) on this man! Remember what Ben Jacques taught a few weeks ago. Christians are not commanded to never make assessments and judgments. We are commanded to remember and know we are not the *ultimate* Judge. Therefore, even in the judgments we make, we make them in submission to the Lord who is the Judge. Therefore, Paul says he makes a judgment here. And, it’s a right one because the Scriptures condemn incest.

With clear Scriptural passages, in excommunication, we are not the ones judging if we are simply stating the clear words of God. What we’re saying in excommunication is that God has said these words. He’s the Judge. So, Paul says to the Corinthians that he’s made his judgment. He aligns with the Lord. And, because of the union Christians have in Jesus, Paul says he’s one in spirit with them, and present in a sense with them. He’s calling them to join him in declaring God’s holy standard to this professing Christian. So, excommunication comes with mourning and judgment. And then, it also comes

With Unity. Read verse 4 with me: ⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus. . .⁶ Now Paul actually tells the Corinthians what to do. Interestingly, we can tend to think legalism is doing something someone tells us to do. But it’s not! Paul’s testing the Corinthians. Will they show an attitude of submission or will they balk at Paul and refuse to do what he says?

What does Paul say? Join him in declaring the judgment of God. But he calls all of them together to do this. This fits with Jesus’ declaration in Matthew 18. In the final phase of discipline, the whole church knows and the whole church declares in unity. As the whole church is together, Paul says that they’re there with the power of the Lord Jesus. There’s much to this phrase, but simply recognize that when excommunication takes place in a Christ-centered, godly fashion, Paul is saying the Lord Jesus is standing there affirming the statement of the church. By the way, this is why when we have excommunicated people, we do it as a church family. The elders alone don’t make this decision. It must be done by the church. With unity, judgment and mourning, there’s excommunication when necessary. And finally, we excommunicate

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 5:3.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 5:4.

With Severity (v. 5). Verse 5 says, “⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”⁷ Removing a professing believer from membership is not a small thing. There’s a spiritual reality that takes place. God sees to it that in the act of excommunication, the person is delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. This is not a light thing to consider. Do you want to be delivered to Satan? This is severe. In a sense, this is why I think this is worse than stoning. However, it’s also more gracious in another sense. In stoning, you’re dead. But here, God even shows a severe mercy. The goal of excommunication is the prayer for repentance. The church has done all they can to confront and the person is unrepentant. Then the person is taken over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, meaning that Satan and his minions will work them over and maybe their eyes will be opened to the utter horror and foolishness of their sin. As a result, they’d be saved in the day of the Lord. This is not a guarantee. But this is the prayer.

One author I read commented on how intriguing this is that Satan could be used as an agent for someone’s salvation. You can be sure Satan doesn’t want the person to be saved, but how amazing that God has power over Satan to *use* Satan for his own purposes. And doesn’t this even show forth the magnitude of the cross of Jesus. At the cross, Satan designed to crush the Savior, the Messiah. He wanted all humanity lost. Yet in the very act of seeking to crush the Savior, Satan was crushed!

God will do whatever it takes to magnify his glory through the Jesus as revealed in the cross! Ventura, this whole letter is about determining to know Jesus Christ and him crucified. This whole letter is a call to live out the ramifications of the gospel. **We must be serious in displaying the glories of the cross – even if that means excommunication - trusting God to use Satan, if necessary, to strip unrepentant people of their love for the world. Where are you today? Where are we as a church? Let’s pray God increases our love for the cross so that we may be a humble church that practices excommunication with mourning, judgment, unity, and severity (when necessary). May Jesus Christ be praised.**

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⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 5:5.