

1 Corinthians 4:18 – 5:13

^{4:18} Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.

²⁰ For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.

²¹ What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

will I discipline or praise you?

^{5:1} It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

immorality amongst you

² You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

your arrogance
remove him

⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit,

Jesus cleanses his body
hope for him

with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened.

your boasting
remove old leaven

For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

Jesus cleansed his body
hope for you

⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;

¹⁰ I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.

no immorality amongst you

¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler— not even to eat with such a one.

¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?

remove the wicked man

¹³ But those who are outside, God judges.

'Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.'

Historical and Cultural Background

Greek dualist views of body and soul

- Stoics believed that the body was inherently filthy, and the soul needed to be guarded from pain and pleasure. Therefore most Stoics discouraged sex and marriage.
- Epicureans believed that the body was irrelevant, and disconnected from the soul. Epicureans opened the pathway to indulging the body in food, sex, and pleasure.

Incest

- Why did the man marry his stepmother? Lust and/or greed. In those days, it was likely that his stepmother was younger than him. Hence, he could have been physically attracted to her. It is also possible that the man did not want his stepmother's wealth to pass to another man if she married again.
- Romans considered incest punishable by exile to an island. Dio Cassius (155 – 235 AD), a Roman consul and historian, referred to it as a 'criminal relation.' Martial (~38 – 104 AD), the Roman poet from Hispania, said to a perpetrator, 'though great Tully were recalled from the nether shades, and Regulus himself were to defend you, you cannot be acquitted.'¹
- The Greek language had four different words that are translated into English as 'love': *eros* (erotic love); *storge* (familial affection); *phileo* (friendship); and *agape* (devotion). According to C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*, they were generally aware that they did not know how to balance or organize the four loves. Hence, incest between stepson and (widowed?) stepmother could be understood as a combination of *eros* and *storge*, but what besides social convention made it wrong?

Passover and Exodus imagery

- Paul encourages the Corinthians to compare themselves to Israel having been just delivered out of Egypt through the Passover (see also 1 Cor.10:1 – 13).
 - For seven days before Passover, the Israelites ate bread without leaven, the organism that causes bread to rise. Leaven symbolized sin, typically pride, which 'puffs up.' Eating unleavened bread symbolized a process of purification.
 - Passover itself was an act of cleansing. It was like male circumcision, when an Israelite male would enter new life through blood, by having something symbolically unclean cut away from him. At Passover the Israelites slew the Passover lamb and then entered new life by passing through its blood on the doorposts. In the first Passover, God was trying to cleanse Israel of any connection with Egyptian practices. Controlling sons, and ultimately sacrificing them, was also common in ancient cultures (Gen.4:16 – 24). God commanded Israel to sacrifice the Passover lamb instead of their own actual firstborn sons, since God was taking the firstborn sons of the Egyptians (Ex.13:14 – 16), in response to Egypt enslaving His 'firstborn son' Israel (Ex.4:22), and even slaying Israel's sons (Ex.1:15 – 16). God wanted to cleanse Israel of that practice, as He did with Abraham (Gen.22). Also, the plagues demonstrated God's power over the Egyptian gods. The Passover was God's attempt to cleanse Israel of various idolatries (Ezk.20:1 – 26), which ultimately was unsuccessful because, among other sins, Israel continued to offer their firstborn sons to the fires of Molech in the wilderness (Ezk.20:26).
- Delivered to Satan: As if an Israelite could go back to Egypt to be re-enslaved by Pharaoh (Satan), to persuade him to desire deliverance and give up his rebelliousness ('the destruction of his flesh' not his 'body' per se), and entrust himself to Jesus once again ('that his spirit might be saved').
- 'Remove the wicked man from among yourselves': Under Moses, the whole community of Israel shared responsibility for the execution of the worst offenders. Sharing in God's judicial responsibility goes back to God's original commission to human beings to have 'dominion' (Gen.1:26 – 28). God delivered the people by judging Egypt for oppression and worshiping false gods. He then shared His judicial responsibility with Moses, who in turn shared it with other elders in Israel (Ex.18; Dt.1:9 – 17; 16:18 – 22) and, for the worst offenders, the whole community (Dt.13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:9, 21; 22:21; 24:7; cf. Judg.20:13). Jesus changed execution to excommunication.

¹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Donald A. Carson, editor, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2010), p.202; 'Tully' is the nickname of Marcus Tullius Cicero, the great orator

Questions

1. Why was this case of incest wrong? Is sexual morality intuitively obvious?
 - a. The stepson-stepmother relationship was not a blood relation.
 - i. Roman culture: The father must be dead. In Roman culture, there was a principle called *patria potestas*, the power of the father. It meant that the father had a very high level of authority over his own family. The father, if alive, would have punished the son.
 - ii. Jewish culture: In the Old Testament, God prohibits incest positionally, not just among blood relations:
 1. ^{18:11} The nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, born to your father, she is your sister, you shall not uncover her nakedness [blood relation]. ¹² You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's blood relative [blood relation]. ¹³ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's blood relative [blood relation]. ¹⁴ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother; you shall not approach his wife, she is your aunt [not a blood relation]. ¹⁵ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness [not a blood relation]. ¹⁶ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness [not a blood relation]. ¹⁷ You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; they are blood relatives. It is lewdness [blood relation on their side]. ¹⁸ You shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness [blood relation on their side]. (Leviticus 18:11 – 18)
 2. Hence, from the stepmother's side, she would have married both a father and his son. She was doing wrong because that was a blood relation on their side. Interestingly, Paul faults the stepson and not the stepmother. This indicates either that the stepmother was not a Christian or that she was in a vulnerable position where her agency was less than the stepson's.
 - b. Illus: In modern times, sometimes our sense of boundaries and appropriateness is not actually clear. This comes from the *Dear Prudence* advice column in Slate, http://www.slate.com/articles/life/dear_prudence/2014/06/dear_prudence_my_husband_slept_with_my_half_sister_while_on_a_business_trip.html
 - i. Q: Husband Slept With My Sister; It Wasn't Part of the Deal: My husband knows that he has a free pass when he goes out of town on business trips, and our policy is don't ask, don't tell. Recently he went on a trip to Las Vegas where my younger half-sister works. I gave my husband her contact info so they could meet up as family members do and catch up. Later I come to find out he had sex with her! I'm mad that he chose to do it with a family member, while my husband insists he thought it was fine because we are not that close and did not grow up together, and he's only ever met her twice. Did I bring this on myself by allowing him free passes, or should he have looked elsewhere for sex?
 - ii. A: Your husband may have gotten a free pass to the buffet at his hotel, but it probably had some fine print on it about how many meals he could get out of it, so he should understand every "free pass" comes with fine print. You and your husband may have a "stays in Vegas" clause to your marriage, but he just busted himself by telling you that your attempt to make sure he had someone nice to have dinner with ended up with him having a companion for breakfast. (And when he's away, do you have a pass to play?) I agree with you that he knows his lame defense, "You barely know your half-sister," is half-baked. However, what's happened has happened. So you need to tell him without rancor why you are hurt, and he needs to understand he owes you an apology, and you two need to clarify your rules.
 - iii. The problem here is the implicit principle. The principle seems to be: as long as you probably won't see her again, it's just a casual one time thing, so what's the harm? The husband seems to be abiding by that principle because he knows that his wife and her stepsister don't have a close relationship and probably won't see each other. That's why Prudence says that "the deal" needs to be explicit. The morality of the situation is not obvious.

- c. Illus: When you google ‘mom slept with my boyfriend’, one of the stories that comes up is from a young woman whose mom has a history of cheating. She writes: ‘It was during the period of our wedding planning that I ran into my mother and fiancé coming out of a hotel close to the house of the caterer I contracted for the wedding. While I was still trying to fathom what both of them could be doing in that place, my mother oblivious of who might be looking gave him a quick peck on his lips before zooming off in her car. I didn’t need to be told what they had gone to do in the hotel. My boyfriend didn’t know what to say when I called out his name. Right there and then he confessed and started begging for my forgiveness. He claimed not to know how it all happened; that all he remembers is my mother inviting him over for discussions concerning the wedding plans. I am pained and so confused. Agatha, our wedding is on December 18. I want to end it all. There is no way I can go ahead with a wedding to the man who has slept with my mother. The worst thing is my mother’s attitude. Even when I confronted her with what she had done, her attitude was ‘so what!’ My boyfriend and his best man have been pleading with me. My chief bride’s mate who has been my friend since our childhood is of the opinion that my mother must have charmed my boyfriend and that the best way to deal with her is to forgive my boyfriend and go ahead with the marriage. I am so confused. I haven’t told my father anything since I don’t want to hurt him more than she has hurt him all these years. Please tell me what to do. He is the only man I have ever fallen in love with in all my life. We have been together for five years and not once has he cheated on me. Even he was away, he kept calling me religiously everyday for the 18 months he was abroad. Once he sent money down for me to visit him. He has been that dedicated to me. He is still insisting he doesn’t know how he ended up in the hotel with my mother.’ (<http://www.nairaland.com/545430/mother-slept-fiance>)
- d. Illus: C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*, says we don’t know what love really is. We have to be told. Re-read the historical and cultural background note about the four types of love. We may know what erotic love, familial affection, and friendship are, so we ‘don’t need Jesus’ in that sense. But we don’t know how to organize the three loves, or how to put boundaries on them. What’s the problem with mixing erotic love and familial affection? That’s where Jesus comes in. He organizes and puts boundaries on the other loves. Surprisingly, in that sense, we don’t know what love is. We have to be told.
- e. How does Paul use the term ‘immoral’? And is falling into immorality enough to get you kicked out of the church?
- i. In 5:1 and then again in 5:9, 10, 11. He sees this as a violation of the moral vision of Jesus for his people. He includes it with covetousness, idolatry, theft, reviling, and getting drunk.
 - ii. No, it’s that the man has changed the definition of sin. It’s one thing to be struggling with say a porn addiction and taking steps to correct yourself, involving others, in agreement that the addiction is a problem. It’s another thing entirely to change the definition of sin so that you don’t think that this is a problem. That’s what was going on here.
2. Who is Paul addressing here? Why not just the man? Why the whole community?
- a. We can assume that someone in the Corinthian church had tried to step through the process that Jesus taught to try to correct someone in sin (Mt.18:15 – 20). That process involved confronting the person one on one, then with two or three others, then bringing it to the whole church. But the process had been cut short or exhausted, and either the leaders or the community had not concluded the process.
 - b. Paul had already tried to address this before, as he refers to his previous letter (5:9). It seems like some of the Corinthian Christians, probably the Jewish Christians, had tried to deal with this as well. But Paul refers to their general ‘arrogance’ (4:18, 19; 5:2) and ‘boasting’ (5:6). Apparently they were being influenced by Greek philosophy to believing that they had transcended Jesus’ moral vision for relationships, and perhaps the reality of the physical human body.
 - c. Notice that Paul does not seem to think the stepmother had moral agency. Perhaps she was not a believer, so it would not make any sense to address her. Perhaps she was somehow powerless in this situation, and taken advantage of by her stepson. In my character sketch of Chloe, I offer a possibility of how this happened.
3. Why do you think the community had not acted before?
- a. Confrontation is hard!

- b. Clearly the influence of Greek culture and thought was affecting the Corinthians' perceptions of the situation. Probably some (the Jewish side) recognized this as a problem. But there was ostensibly a strong faction (probably mostly Greek) that tried to rationalize it away. This was probably one of the root causes of the division spoken of earlier in 1:10 – 3:23.
 - c. If the man who married his stepmother was wealthy, and was either giving a lot or allowing his house to be used as a meeting space, it would have been financially costly to confront him.
 - d. Why does Paul say, 'Do not even eat with such a man'? What about Jesus' teaching about eating with sinners and tax collectors (Luke 14:12 – 14; 15:1 – 2)? Is this consistent? Yes! We'll see below that Jesus still wants the Christian community to reach out to the guy *as if he were a non-Christian*. It's not until he's ready to repent of his beliefs (and make even a little progress in his behavior) that he can be readmitted into Christian fellowship. The 'you' in v.9, 10, 11 is the plural 2nd person. There were times of corporate worship and fellowship where the Christians ate together as the body of Christ. We will see that in 1 Cor.11:18 – 32. The guy is to be not admitted to that meal.
4. What does Paul want the Corinthians to understand about Jesus?
 - a. State: He cleansed his own body, personally and physically. He did that by never sinning during his life, and then killing the corruption in his human nature at the cross.
 - b. If you were Jewish, what did Passover make you think of?
 - c. In the Passover event, the Israelites seem to have renounced an unclean attitude – their control over their firstborn sons. They gave up that control. The lamb was slain to carry it away, and the sinful practice was supposed to die with it. The lamb gave back its uncorrupted blood so the Israelites could pass through it into new life.
 - d. Jesus cleansed his own human nature of the corruption of sin through his life, death, and resurrection. Hence, people now enter into his deeper new life by passing through him ('his blood') as a kind of doorway, in a sense, and being in him by his Spirit.
 - e. Illus: Harry Potter as an analogy
 - f. What about Jesus giving us forgiveness from God? Didn't he just absorb God's wrath at the cross? Well if that were true, why doesn't Paul just say that?
 5. What hope is there for the man?
 - a. The idea of some separation is actually meant to benefit him.
 - b. Won't the guy want to indulge more?
 - c. Illus: R's experience of being restored
 - d. Evidence that in the early church, there was hope for an excommunicated person: 'I am greatly grieved for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you, because he so little understands the place that was given him [in the Church]. I exhort you, therefore, that ye abstain from covetousness, and that ye be chaste and truthful. 'Abstain from every form of evil.' (1 Th.5:22) For if a man cannot govern himself in such matters, how shall he enjoin them on others? If a man does not keep himself from covetousness, he shall be defiled by idolatry, and shall be judged as one of the heathen. But who of us are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord? 'Do we not know that the saints shall judge the world?' (1 Cor.6:2) as Paul teaches. But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, in the midst of whom the blessed Paul laboured, and who are commended in the beginning of his Epistle. For he boasts of you in all those Churches which alone then knew the Lord; but we [of Smyrna] had not yet known Him. I am deeply grieved, therefore, brethren, for him (Valens) and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be ye then moderate in regard to this matter, and 'do not count such as enemies,' (2 Th.3:15) but call them back as suffering and straying members, that ye may save your whole body. For by so acting ye shall edify yourselves.' (*Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians*, chapter 11) Polycarp lived from about 65 – 155 AD, was discipled by the apostle John, became bishop of Smyrna, and was teacher of Irenaeus (130 – 200 AD), who became bishop of Lyon and author of *Against Heresies*, probably the greatest work of Christian theology in the second century.
 6. What are we supposed to understand about ourselves?
 - a. What does Paul mean by 'judge'? Look at the chiasmic structure. 'Judge' and 'be removed' in v.2 and v.3 is paralleled with 'clean out the old leaven' in v.7. To judge in this context is to perceive the uncleanness and remove it. Jesus cleansed his own body, so Jesus cleanses his own body.
 - b. We are a community that has been delivered and is journeying to the new garden land. This is similar to the Israelites' experience after the Passover and in the wilderness.

- c. Jesus reshaped his community to share in the *excommunication* of unrepentant offenders who taught error. We no longer put anyone to death. But we are all supposed to care for the cleansing of the body.
 - i. For those who struggle with the question of why God instituted that for Israel in the first place, I think it's important to say that God was treating Israel as a community as if it were one body. Individual Israelites were free to leave the covenant, but if they were going to be part of the covenant community and live on God's good land, God was going to treat them as if they were one human body with Him dwelling in it. That's why execution of some offenders represented what Jesus would later do within himself: cut off the impurity and corruption by condemning sin within his own flesh (Romans 8:3).
- d. Illus: Our house asking a woman to leave our house because she could not reconcile with another woman. She was not able to stop gossiping about it with others outside, either.
- e. Illus: me and student leaders having to ask someone to step down from leadership
- f. Application: On campus, as a student organization, we don't practice excommunication in the sense that we prevent people from coming to our meetings. And we don't celebrate the sacraments. But we do in the sense that in leadership selection, we believe that one has to be a Christian in belief and practice. If a person is saying by the substance of their belief and practice that they are not a Christian, then we do not select them to be a student leader.