

Immorality In Corinth

"It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even among the Gentiles, that one of you hath his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and did not rather mourn that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Cor. 5:1f).

It is not surprising that the Corinthian church had immorality within it. Corinth was a cesspool of immorality and their "worship" of their gods involved immorality. Corinth was a center for such wickedness. In the first century to "Corinthianize" was a term in vogue describing anyone loose in morals. New converts from among the Gentiles would have a long way to go toward becoming mature in faith and life. There was a Jewish element in the church which might have had better morals than the Gentiles, but there was no guarantee. Paul reminded the Jews in Rome that *"the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you ..."* (Rom. 2:24). The text does not reveal whether the offending brother was Jew or Gentile.

There is no way to ascertain the true "relationship" the *"father's wife"* stood to the son who had *"taken"* her. Was she a stepmother? Was she the son's natural mother? One's heart revolts at such a thought and perhaps that is the reason why most are prone to conclude the *"father's wife"* was the son's *"stepmother"*. But the other alternative must not be dismissed. The fact that it is so unnatural that a son would commit incest with his own mother is why the Gentiles in Corinth were shocked. God did not reveal. Some things we know. We know the attitude of Corinthian brethren was wrong. For a second time the indictment was made against the Corinthian brethren being "puffed up" or sinfully proud (1 Cor. 4:18; 5:2). Perhaps this son's behavior was an early sign of the doctrine greater in intensity near the close of the century: "Liberty in Christ equals license to sin." John's letter to both Pergamum and Thyatira revealed some brethren in both churches espoused that doctrine (Rev. 2:14, 20-22). Whatever the underlying cause for these Corinthians' "pride" in this immoral brother, it was wrong. They should have mourned and taken action against him (1 Cor. 5:6).

The fact that this brother's sin is called *"fornication"* is an illustration of the general nature of the word. Some understand the word *"fornication"* to be used exclusively to describe sexual immorality among unmarried, while *"adultery"* is a term to describe sexual immorality among those married. Admittedly *"adultery"* is more restricted in that it refers to sexual immorality among those married; fornication does not refer exclusively to the unmarried. The word is a broad term which describes sexual impurity -- of any nature -- unmarried, married, or homosexual (Jude 7). Ezekiel used the

word "*fornication*" to describe adultery on the part of what God's spiritual wife, and why he divorced her (Ezek. 16:8-26).

The unconcerned attitude of the Corinthians merited and deserved the sharp rebuke from Paul. "*Your glorying is not good*" (5:6); "*with such a one, no, not to eat*" (5:11); "*put away the wicked man from among yourselves*" (5:13). Many were the dangers to the Corinthian brethren by persistently harboring this brother in his wickedness, not the least of which was the adage "*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (5:6). It is a known truth that things we ignore do not "just go away." To ignore signs of disease in the body will not restore good health; rather the disease will spread further and bring death. So it was with the adulterous brother in Corinth. If they continued to ignore his sin, that same sin would soon speak to others and become nontreatable: spiritual death would result. We dare not ignore such sins among us.

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