

# The Book of 1 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 4: Dealing with Immorality in the Church

### 1 Corinthians 5:1–13

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter sets out the doctrine and practice of church discipline, and what is doctrinally at stake is the holiness of the church and the seriousness of sin among God's people. Paul confronts a congregation that has grown comfortable with open immorality and even proud of its tolerance. The teacher should help students see that the church, as God's holy temple bought by the blood of Christ, cannot make peace with unrepentant sin in its members, and that the New Testament gives the local congregation both the right and the duty to address such sin. Handle the severe language of 5:5 carefully: the aim of removing an unrepentant member is always redemptive, that the person may be brought to repentance and saved, never mere punishment or self-righteous expulsion.

At the same time, this is intensely formational, and in two directions. First, it confronts our own tolerance of sin, the little leaven we excuse, and calls us to honest grief and cleansing. Second, it presses us toward a harder and truer love, the kind that refuses to let a brother destroy himself and refuses to let sin quietly corrupt the family of God. Be alert to the cultural pressure on your students, who live in an age that often equates love with leaving everything alone.

Aim, then, at a balanced and Christlike heart. Send students home taking sin seriously in themselves and in the body, understanding why a holy people must deal with unrepentant sin, and yet full of grace, clear that the goal of all such discipline is restoration, and that engagement with sinners outside the church is expected of every disciple.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*Paul is shocked not only by the sexual immorality in the church but by the church's response: "And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn?" (5:1–2). What does it reveal about a church when it can be confronted with open, serious sin and feel pride or indifference rather than grief?*

##### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene plainly. A man in the church was in a sexual relationship with his father's wife, conduct that even pagan Corinth found scandalous. The shock for Paul, though, is the church's reaction: not grief, but arrogance.

Explore what that arrogance reveals. A church able to look at open sin and feel pride or indifference has lost its sense of God's holiness and of sin's seriousness. Their boasting in chapters 1 through 4 has curdled into a tolerance that congratulates itself.

Draw out Paul's expected response: mourning (5:2). The healthy reaction to sin in the body is grief, both for the dishonor to Christ and for the danger to the sinner. Where there is no grief, there is spiritual sickness.

Apply it gently to the present. Churches today can drift into the same complacency, treating tolerance of sin as enlightenment. Paul calls us back to a tender conscience that grieves rather than shrugs.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The holiness of God and the seriousness of sin among his people
- Grief, not pride or indifference, as the healthy response to sin in the body (5:2)
- Tolerance of sin mistaken for openness or strength
- A dulled conscience as a sign of spiritual sickness
- The honor of Christ at stake in how the church handles sin

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it reveal when a church feels pride rather than grief over sin?
- Why is mourning the fitting response to sin in the body?
- Where might our consciences have grown dull toward sin we have learned to tolerate?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*The Corinthians had reframed their tolerance of sin as a kind of openness or strength. Where have you been tempted to relabel sin in your own life, calling it freedom, a personality trait, or no one's business, so that you no longer have to grieve over it or deal with it? What would honest mourning over that sin look like?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-examining question takes the relabeling of sin from Corinth into our own hearts. We are skilled at renaming sins so we no longer have to mourn them.

Help students hear the common euphemisms: freedom, just how I am, my private business, a small thing. Each one quietly removes a sin from the category of grief and repentance.

Point toward honest mourning. Godly grief over sin is not morbid self-hatred; it is taking sin as seriously as God does, which is the doorway to repentance and cleansing.

Aim for one honest naming. Ask each student to identify one sin they have relabeled and to call it by its true name before God this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The habit of relabeling sin to avoid dealing with it
- Godly grief over sin as the doorway to repentance
- Taking sin as seriously as God does
- Honest self-examination before the Lord

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What sins are you tempted to relabel as freedom or personality?
- What would honest mourning over that sin look like?
- Why is grief over sin a healthy and hopeful thing?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul writes, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (5:7). How does the image of leaven explain the way tolerated sin spreads in a person and in a church, and how does the sacrifice of Christ as our Passover give us both the motive and the power to live pure lives?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Explain the leaven image from its Passover background. Before Passover, every trace of yeast was removed from the house. Leaven works invisibly and pervasively; a small amount changes the whole lump. So it is with tolerated sin.

Apply the image both ways Paul intends. In a person, a small excused sin spreads, dulling the conscience and opening the door to more. In a church, tolerated sin normalizes itself and reshapes the community's sense of what is acceptable.

Bring in the gospel ground in 5:7: "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." Believers are already, by God's reckoning, an unleavened people, set apart by the blood of the Lamb. The call to cleanse out the leaven is a call to become in practice what we already are in Christ.

Stress that the cross supplies both motive and power. We pursue purity not to earn God's favor but because Christ has already redeemed us at the cost of his blood, and the One who saved us also empowers the new life.

Make it concrete. Ask what specific old leaven, a habit, a relationship, an attitude, needs cleansing in light of what Christ has done.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The pervasive, spreading nature of tolerated sin (5:6)
- Christ as our Passover Lamb, sacrificed for us (5:7)
- Becoming in practice the unleavened people we already are in Christ
- The cross as both the motive and the power for holiness
- Purity pursued out of gratitude, not to earn favor

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does leaven picture the way sin spreads in us and among us?
- How does Christ our Passover give us reason and power to be pure?
- What old leaven is God calling you to cleanse out?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul roots the call to purity in what Christ has already done as our Passover Lamb. When you consider that Christ was sacrificed to free you from sin, how does remembering the cost of your redemption change the way you regard the sins you are tempted to keep? Where do you need to “cleanse out the old leaven” this week?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question takes the cross personally. Paul grounds purity in the price already paid: Christ was sacrificed for us. Remembering that price reframes how we regard our cherished sins.

Help students connect cost and conduct. When we remember that our sin cost the Lamb his life, the sins we are tempted to keep look very different, no longer harmless indulgences but the very things that nailed him to the cross.

Guard against guilt-driven striving. The point is not to grovel but to let gratitude move us. A redeemed people cleanse out the leaven because they love the One who bought them.

Aim for one specific cleansing. Ask each student to name one old leaven they will, by God's power and out of love for Christ, put away this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The cost of redemption as motive for purity
- Seeing cherished sins in light of the cross
- Gratitude rather than guilt as the engine of holiness
- Concrete repentance flowing from remembering the price

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does remembering the cost of your redemption change how you see your sins?
- What old leaven do you most need to cleanse out this week?
- How can gratitude, not guilt, drive that change?

## Question 5

### Student Question:

*Paul instructs the church to deliver the unrepentant man over “for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (5:5). What does this teach about the purpose of removing an unrepentant member from fellowship, and how is even this severe action ultimately aimed at the person’s restoration and salvation rather than at mere punishment?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Handle the difficult phrase “deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” with care. To put someone outside the fellowship of the church is to put them back into the realm of the world, outside the protective community of God’s people, so that the painful consequences might bring them to their senses.

Stress the stated purpose: “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” The aim is not vengeance or self-protection but the sinner’s ultimate salvation. Discipline is medicine, not execution.

Connect this to the wider New Testament. Discipline always intends restoration (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1; 2 Corinthians 2:5–11, where the disciplined man, having repented, is to be welcomed back with comfort). The door is always open to the returning penitent.

Apply it pastorally. A church that disciplines without longing for restoration has missed the point entirely. The severity is in service of love, like a parent’s hardest decisions for a child’s good.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The redemptive purpose of removing an unrepentant member, his salvation (5:5)
- Discipline as medicine aimed at repentance, not punishment or vengeance
- Restoration as the consistent goal across the New Testament (2 Corinthians 2:5–11)
- The door kept open to the returning penitent
- Severity in the service of genuine love

### Discussion Prompts

- What is the stated purpose of the discipline Paul commands?
- How is even this severe step an act of love?
- How should the hope of restoration shape the way a church disciplines?

## Question 6

**Student Question:**

*Church discipline is meant to wake a person up and call them home, not to crush them. How do you tend to respond when someone who loves you confronts you about sin? Are you more likely to grow defensive and distance yourself, or to receive correction as an act of love? Where do you need a softer, more teachable heart?*

**Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question turns discipline inward to our own teachability. Before we think about confronting others, we must ask how we receive confrontation.

Help students notice their reflexes. Defensiveness, withdrawal, excuse-making, and counterattack are common reactions to correction. A teachable heart is rare and precious.

Frame correction as love. The friend who risks the discomfort of telling us the truth is acting like Christ. To receive it well is a mark of humility and maturity.

Aim for one softened response. Ask each student to recall recent correction they resisted, and to consider receiving it now as an act of love meant for their good.

**Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Receiving correction as an act of love
- Defensiveness and withdrawal as obstacles to growth
- A teachable heart as a mark of maturity
- Humility before those who love us enough to tell the truth

**Discussion Prompts**

- How do you typically respond when someone confronts you about sin?
- Why is loving correction a gift rather than an attack?
- Where do you need a more teachable heart right now?

**Question 7****Student Question:**

*Paul clarifies that he is not telling them to avoid the sexually immoral “of this world,” since then they “would need to go out of the world,” but rather not to associate with anyone who “bears the name of brother” yet lives in unrepentant sin (5:9–11). Why does Paul draw such a sharp distinction between how we relate to the unbelieving world and how we relate to an unrepentant member of the church?*

**Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Clarify the distinction Paul draws, which is easily missed. He never told them to avoid the immoral people of the world; that would require leaving the world altogether. His command concerns one who “bears the name of brother” yet lives in unrepentant sin.

Explain the logic. The world is not under the church’s discipline; we expect unbelievers to live as unbelievers, and we are sent to them with the gospel. But a professing Christian who persists in open sin claims the name of Christ while denying it by his life, and that both dishonors the Lord and endangers the church.

Guard against two errors. One is withdrawing from sinners in the world, which contradicts the mission of Christ, who was a friend of sinners. The other is treating the church as casually as the world, refusing to address sin among believers.

Apply it to attitude. The point is not contempt for the world but clarity about the church. We love sinners outside and pursue them with grace, while holding the family of God to the standard of the family of God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The different ways we relate to the unbelieving world and to an unrepentant member (5:9–11)
- The church, not the world, as the sphere of the church’s discipline
- The mission to engage sinners in the world with the gospel
- The danger of a professing believer who denies Christ by his life
- Loving the world without holding it to the family standard

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does Paul treat the world and the church so differently here?
- What error would it be to withdraw from sinful people in the world?
- Why is unrepentant sin in a professing believer such a serious matter?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul assumes Christians will live among, and stay in contact with, sinful people in the world, while holding the church to a different standard. Are you actually engaged with people outside the faith, building real relationships with those who do not yet know Christ, or have you quietly withdrawn into a Christian bubble? Where might God be calling you to be more present in the world without being shaped by it?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question presses Paul's assumption that Christians remain engaged with the world. Many believers quietly retreat into a Christian bubble and lose all real contact with those who do not know Christ.

Help students assess their actual relationships. Do they have genuine, caring friendships with unbelievers, or only with people who already share their faith?

Hold the balance Paul holds: in the world, present and loving, but not of the world, not shaped by its sin. Withdrawal and compromise are both failures.

Aim for one step toward engagement. Ask each student to name one person outside the faith they could intentionally love and draw near to this season.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Genuine engagement with people outside the faith
- The danger of retreating into a Christian bubble
- Being in the world without being shaped by it
- Love and presence as the soil for sharing the gospel

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Do you have real relationships with people who do not yet know Christ?
- Where have you withdrawn into a Christian bubble?
- Who is one person God may be calling you to draw near to?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul asks, "Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside," and he commands, "Purge the evil person from among you" (5:12–13). What responsibility does this passage give a local congregation to guard its own holiness, and how should a church carry out this difficult duty in a way that is both firm about sin and aimed at restoring the sinner?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. Paul lays the responsibility for the church's holiness on the congregation itself: "Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?" and "Purge the evil person from among you" (5:12–13). The local church is charged with guarding its own purity.

Define the duty carefully. This is not a license for harshness, gossip, or hunting for faults. It is the sober responsibility of a congregation to address open, serious, unrepentant sin among its own members, after patient appeal, for the sake of the sinner and the body.



Lay out the manner the New Testament prescribes. Confrontation comes first and privately, with the goal of winning the brother (Matthew 18:15–17). Restoration is pursued gently, by those watching their own hearts (Galatians 6:1). Removal is the last step, reached only when there is no repentance, and the door home remains open (2 Corinthians 2:5–11).

Connect this to the nature of the Lord's church. As God's holy temple, bought with the blood of Christ, the church cannot be indifferent to sin in its members without ceasing to be what God called it to be. Discipline rightly done is an act of love for Christ, for the church, and for the sinner.

End with the redemptive horizon again. The whole aim, even of the severest step, is that the wanderer would be brought back. A church should grieve when discipline is needed, act when it must, and rejoice when the lost one returns.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The local congregation's responsibility to guard its own holiness (5:12–13)
- Discipline reserved for open, serious, unrepentant sin, not faultfinding
- The prescribed manner: private appeal first, gentleness, removal only as a last step (Matthew 18:15–17; Galatians 6:1)
- The church as God's holy temple that cannot be indifferent to sin in its members
- Restoration of the sinner as the abiding goal (2 Corinthians 2:5–11)
- Grief when discipline is needed and joy when the wanderer returns

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What responsibility does this passage give the local congregation?
- What does the New Testament say about how discipline should be carried out?
- How can a church be both firm about sin and aimed at restoring the sinner?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back across the whole chapter. Paul calls a complacent church to grieve over sin, to cleanse out the leaven, and to love a wandering brother enough to act for his salvation. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Corinthians 5 that you most need to carry into this coming week?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone asks students to gather the chapter and name one way Christ is forming them. Let them speak first.

If needed, recall the movements: the call from complacency to grief, the leaven and the Passover Lamb, the redemptive aim of discipline, the distinction between world and church, and the congregation's charge to guard its holiness.

Watch for the two ditches as students respond: harshness that loves the rule more than the person, and laxity that loves comfort more than holiness. Steer toward the Christlike center, truth and grace together.

Push toward the specific and close in prayer that students would take sin seriously in themselves and love the body and the wanderer well this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Personal formation through taking sin seriously in love
- Holding truth and grace together
- Avoiding both harshness and laxity
- Moving from general agreement to a specific, named response

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which part of this chapter pressed on you most, and why?
- What is the one truth from 1 Corinthians 5 you most need this week?
- What named step is God asking you to take in response?