



1 Cor 5:9-13
Of Boats and Water

9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner -- not even to eat with such a person.

12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

Kids, where do boats belong? Are boats supposed to be pulled up on land, many miles from the water? Can you sail a ship on the land? No, boats are supposed to be in the water, right?

But let me ask you it's a good thing for a boat to be in the water, but is it a good thing for the water to be in the boat? *No!* What happens when the water gets into the boat? It sinks, right?

Well, what Paul wrote here to the church in Corinth was to remind them that the church is like a boat and the world is like an ocean. The church is supposed to be in the world, sailing in the sea. Christians are called to be "fishers of men" and we do our fishing by casting the net of the gospel into the world and drawing men up into the boat of the church. But the church has a real problem if it starts to let the water of the world in, if enough water gets in eventually the church will sink, it will become worldly and useless.

Paul mentions that he had written to them about this subject in an earlier letter, probably answering a question asked by members of the church. Now some people when they read that are uneasy or they panic, "Oh no! One of the books of the bible is missing! We have first and second Corinthians, but we are missing ½ Corinthians." That isn't the case at all. God has given us every letter and gospel that we need, we have everything that is necessary ***"for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"*** to paraphrase Paul in 2 Tim. 3:16-17

This does not, however mean that God has preserved every piece of correspondence Paul and the other Apostles had with the churches or even given us a record of everything that Jesus and the Apostles did. We don't know everything, and recording all of it would have been impossible. John himself writes in the last verse of his Gospel: ***John 21:25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.***

What Paul was referring to then is one of these many little pieces of correspondence long since lost, but we know from what he mentions here the gist of what he told them, which was that they shouldn't keep fellowship with sexually immoral people. And what he meant was that they must not tolerate the presence of the openly immoral, and he gives 4 examples of sinful immorality in verse 11, within the church. These were precisely the kind of people they should be exercising church discipline towards and casting out of the church if they would not repent.

But apparently the Corinthians had missed his meaning and assumed that he was talking about people outside the church in society. Paul says that's ridiculous, if you try to avoid these people entirely in the world you'd have to leave the world, because unregenerate society is literally full of the covetous, extortioners, idolaters and the sexually immoral. You couldn't even go into the marketplace to go shopping if you were going to try to avoid these people entirely!

Now some churches have tried to do that, they have tried to leave the world entirely and create a holy and separate community. We call that urge *monasticism*. In the middle ages monks formed societies and left the world and lived together, but they inevitably found that instead of escaping from sin, they brought the sin with them. As Martin Luther who spent several years as an Augustinian Monk put it, ***"you can take the Monk out of the world, but you can't take the World out of the Monk"*** Later during the reformation, groups called Anabaptists tried again to leave the world behind, these groups later when on to become the Amish and the Mennonites.

The problem there of course is not only that we will never be entirely able to escape from sin, not when churches are essentially groups of saved sinners, but also because it is our calling as Christians to ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"*** as Mark 16:15 puts it. Monasticism is also fundamentally flawed in that it creates a kind of hothouse Christianity that is too weak to flourish in contact with the world.

If I can make an analogy, let us say that you were raised in an entirely sterile environment and your immune system was never exposed to any of the viruses or bacteria in the world, you never had to deal with the common child hood diseases and so on and so your immune system would never learn to deal with infections. If that was the case, the first disease that slipped past the airlock might well be fatal.

Rather we need to be in contact with the world, not only to win it, but to learn to resist, to answer and to confront. Jesus set the example for us. Roger Ellsworth wrote: ***"Jesus himself made it clear in both example and teaching, how he would have us relate to this world. Thank God, he did not respond to the evil of this world by staying at a safe distance in heaven, but plunged right into the midst of it. And he has made it plain that his followers are to follow his example by comparing them to salt and light. Salt to do its work, must be in contact with food; light to do its work, must confront darkness."***

But note what Jesus did and didn't do, while he was in contact with sinners, he didn't tolerate or embrace their sin, he confronted it and called them to repentance. In answering why he kept up contact with sinners, Jesus said this:

12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Unfortunately, too many Christians instead of acting as physicians and helping the sick, end up catching the diseases themselves. In fact sometimes you can have the situation that prevailed in Corinth, a church full of proud people who condemned the sins of the people on the outside, but coddled the sins of those on the inside. This is called *hypocrisy* and is an abomination.

What good does it do us to spend all our time judging those outside the church and complaining about their sins? Of course they are sinners! They're unsaved, they're dead. They no more have the capacity to clean up their act than a dead man has the ability to copy the living. They live in the Necropolis, the city of the dead, and unless they are brought to spiritual life and flee to Christ for refuge, God will judge them on the last day.

The church, is to be about the business then not of censuring those on the outside, but of converting them and the judging needs to go on inside amongst those who are supposedly alive. It is men like this brother who had an illicit relationship with his father's wife who needed to be judged via church discipline and then excommunicated. Put out of fellowship. Now the greatest act of fellowship was of course sitting down and breaking bread together in the communal meal, to be excommunicated is to no longer have any part in the fellowship of that meal. To no longer eat with the brethren. The Apostle John warned that we are not to have fellowship with the Apostate saying:

***2 John 1:10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;
11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deed***

Now a few words of application. People who hear this usually ask at least 2 questions:

1) ***Ok if we are supposed to have contact with the world, how much should we have?*** Keep the idea of the covenant community in mind at all times. Remember that you are a people set apart for the Lord and distinctively different because of his work in your hearts. Do *not* make the mistake of thinking you and worldlings are the same. Therefore while you will need to work in the world, do business in the world, talk with unbelievers and so on. Do not yoke yourself together with them by making them bosom friends, business partners, spouses and so on. Do not date them. More than once I have said simply to someone who is that God's children shouldn't play with dead things. They are spiritually dead. Do not make them your counselors.

Above all keep the phrase "fishers of men" in mind, your contact with the world should be either necessary or redemptive in nature, you can and should have acquaintances with unbelievers so that you might exercise that salt and light function and act as a physician, but do not think for a moment that close *fellowship* with the unredeemed is possible or that it will bring anything but heartache.

For their good and yours don't treat them like something they are not.

Remember that you are sheep in the midst of wolves and be as wily as serpents, but as gentle as doves in your dealings with them.

2) ***How should we treat the excommunicated?*** First off remember that there is a difference between someone who has never been a member of a church and someone who has been excommunicated. The first is an unbeliever, the second is an apostate. While we should allow people who have been lawfully excommunicated to come to hear the preaching of the word, obviously they cannot come to the table of

the Lord and neither should they be eating in our homes. We should be civil, and we should be willing to speak of the things of the Lord with them and exhort them to repentance whenever we can.

But once again, for their good and yours don't treat them like something they are not. It does no good for the people of the congregation to undermine the discipline of the church by circumventing it. Notice the corporate nature of what Paul is telling the church to do – don't have company with such a person, don't eat with them, put away from yourselves the evil person. Don't secretly seek to circumvent that as it can only encourage the person to remain in their current condition and If a person is encouraged to go on in the condition that lead to their excommunication, where is the chastening that leads to reclamation? How is that loving or wise?