

**LESSONS FROM A CHURCH SCANDAL**

The scandalous situation in 1 Cor. 5:1-13 is one of the worst in the entire Bible. A church member was sexually involved with his father's wife, and the church had not excommunicated him.

The commentary in this study is from a [Biblical Sociology](#) class at fictitious Quest Bible College.

**Dr Quest (on arrogance and going astray)**

The chapter on the incestuous man in First Corinthians is not pleasant reading. Like it or not, however, it is very important. Our question today is why the church was so tolerant of the man's gross sin.

Paul said that the root problem was arrogance (5:2, 6), but what does that mean? I believe he meant that the church had willfully turned away from biblical authority (4:18, 5:4) and practice (5:13, Lev. 18:8). On our worldview diagram [below] this is pictured as a deviation from the biblical 'north pole' in two directions. First, the church wrongly asserted that they had more authority than Paul (4:18-20) which was a deviation in the easterly (group-over-God) direction. Second, the church favored a sinful individual in their midst which was a deviation in the westerly (personal-rights-over-God) direction. Thus, the church went astray. What do you think about the situation?

The North represents God, the Bible, and biblical faith.

North

In western cultures, God is viewed as 'my God' and the local church is often neglected.

In eastern cultures, God is viewed as 'our God' and the church may have too much authority.

West

The West represent cultures in which the individual is stressed.

East

The East represents cultures in which the group is stressed.

In eastern cultures, being different is usually considered sinful.

In western cultures, group pressure to conform is considered sinful.

South

The south represents sin, evil, and biblical repentance.

**Socie** (on the social nature of the chapter)

Most people think of the incestuous man's relationship with his stepmother as a sickening, physical perversion which, of course, it was. So Paul called for the destruction of the flesh (5:5). Yet, most of what I see in the passage is actually **social**, about why the man needed to be expelled from the church. I don't think much is said about the sin itself.

**Theo** (on the theological nature of the chapter)

Yesss... but putting it another way, I think there is a ton of practical **theological** content in the chapter [and chapter four as well], especially about the awesome authority of God in Christ and how the church should respond to and exercise that authority (5:3-5). God's word, will, and testimony are far more important than either personal rights or relational harmony. The believers in Corinth did not seem to understand that very well. I don't think people in churches today do either.

Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).	
<b>A</b>	( ) The incestuous man's sin was shocking.
A-1	( ) His sin was not just a one-time thing (5:1).
A-2	( ) He was worse than Reuben (Gen. 35:22, 49:3-4).
A-3	( ) It can be dangerous to even think about his sin (5:1-2).
A-4	( ) His sin was so bad that Paul only mentioned it briefly (5:1).
A-5	( ) He was so bad that Paul said the man was a son of Satan (5:5).
A-6	( ) His sin is forbidden in the Old Testament (Lev. 18:8, 20:11, Deut. 27:20).
<b>B</b>	( ) The incestuous man's sin was very harmful.
B-1	( ) He hurt the Lord's testimony.
B-2	( ) He corrupted the church (5:6-8).
B-3	( ) He harmed himself greatly (5:5, 6:18).
B-4	( ) He harmed himself by doing his own thing.
B-5	( ) Perhaps he repented later (5:5, 2 Cor. 2:5-11).
<b>C</b>	( ) The incestuous man was not alone.
C-1	( ) The man apparently had many defenders (5:2, 6-7).
C-2	( ) His stepmother was just as guilty as he was (Lev. 20:11).
C-3	( ) He may have been wealthy and influential in the city (5:1-2).
C-4	( ) The church allowed him to do the great harm that he did (5:2).
C-5	( ) He was probably the biggest problem in the church (9:24-10:32, 13:1-13).

**Ichiro** (on the worldview compass)

I like how the compass diagram helps explain why western Christians seem to stress the personal aspect of faith more than believers back home in Japan do. It also explains why loyalty to your church is stressed more in the East than it is here in the West, but I'm confused about today's passage. I think all the Christians I know in America or Japan would reject this terrible man.

**Indy** (on relational arrogance)

Yes, of course, they would, in theory, as long as the man and his stepmother were people that they didn't know personally. It is the personal connection that makes the difference. The church members in Corinth probably knew the incestuous pair quite well. So some of them who were not as close to Paul didn't like the apostle telling the church what to do (4:18). Of course, it was really the Lord Jesus Christ who was in charge, but they seemed to have forgotten (5:4).

Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

<b>D</b>	( ) The church protected the evil man because he was an insider.
D-1	( ) As Corinthians, they were used to gross sin (5:1).
D-2	( ) They enjoyed being well connected (1:11-12, 3:21-23).
D-3	( ) They went to extremes rejecting evil outsiders (5:9-11).
D-4	( ) They wanted to avoid relational troubles and pain (4:20, 5:2).
D-5	( ) Protecting the man was like keeping a bomb in the house (5:6-8).
D-6	( ) Those who refuse to deal with sin at first end up defending it later.
D-7	( ) They hurt the church by allowing the evil man to stay in their group.
D-8	( ) The church could help the incestuous man by excommunicating him (5:5).
D-9	( ) God was offended because the church favored their group over Him.
<b>E</b>	( ) The church protected the evil man because they disliked authority.
E-1	( ) They had to be pressured to do right (5:4-5).
E-2	( ) They arrogantly rejecting Paul's authority (4:18-5:2).
E-3	( ) They had a worldly, superficial view of authority (4:6-17).
E-4	( ) Paul was rejected (4:18) in order to protect the evil man (5:1).
E-5	( ) The church did not want to be judgemental like Paul was (5:3, 12).
E-6	( ) Rejecting Paul's authority was rejecting God's authority (4:16-20, 5:3-5).
E-7	( ) They did not understand the church's authority and responsibility (5:4-8).
E-8	( ) They disliked authority because they were selfish and competitive (13:4-7).
E-9	( ) God was offended because the church favored an individual over Him.

Commentary from various perspectives as overheard in a [Biblical Sociology](#) class at imaginary Quest Bible College

**Dr. Quest** (on the two incorrect lines)

This is a great study! I hope you enjoyed the worksheets as much as I did. Most of the lines are correct, but there are a few tricky ones. Two lines are incorrect. First, Paul did not say that the incestuous man was a son of Satan in 5:5 (A-5). In fact, Paul hoped that the man would repent and be save (D-8), and perhaps he was saved later (B-5). Second, the church's refusal to excommunicate the evil man was a bigger problem than the man himself. There were also other serious problems in the church. So line C-5 is incorrect. What lines did you notice?

**Red** (on the rejection of biblical authority)

For me, line E-4 was a bit tricky because the evil man was not the only reason Paul was rejected. His case maybe just the prime example of the arrogant rejection the apostle's God-given authority (4:18-19, E-2). Selfishness in general was involved (E-8), and the first half of chapter four shows that many at Corinth belittled Paul because he was not wealthy or powerful in a worldly sense (C-3). They didn't understand authority (E, E-3). Second Corinthians shows this as well.

**Dan** (on the feast of unleavened bread)

I like the line which says keeping the evil man in the church was like keeping a bomb in your house (D-5). I marked it partly correct since the leaven of sin is very dangerous, though it tends to spread gradually. — That said, I wish the close relationship between the Passover which represents the Messiah's death and our salvation and the feast of unleavened bread which represents sanctification (5:7-8) had been mentioned in a worksheet line. Paul used some powerful Old Testament imagery.

**Frank** (on sticking to the main topic)

Can't we keep it simple and stay on topic? The man hurt the Lord's testimony (B-1) and corrupted the church (B-2), but the church allowed him to do it (C-4, D-7). Why? Well, frankly, that's what we are supposed to be talking about instead of all this other stuff.

**Dr. Quest** (on the two reasons the man was not removed)

Yes, let's get back to why the evil man was permitted to remain in the church. The worksheet basically shows that there were two main reasons. The first one was because the man was an insider (D) rather than outsider (D-3). The second reason was because the Corinthians church members disliked biblical authority (E) and misunderstood it (E-3, E-7). Was it just the sinful man who did his own thing (B-4)? No, the Corinthian church did as well (E-1). What are your concluding thoughts?

**Red** (on the need to repent, then and now)

I understand what happened back then, but how does that relate to us today? The church offended the Lord by putting group harmony and a sinful man before Him (D-9, E-9), having lost their way by proudly following their personal and cultural preferences. [See the compass diagram.] I think the church today has done the same thing. The rejection of purity (E-5) in favor of church growth is a sure sign of it. — So let's read what Paul said about the church in the last days in 2 Tim. 3:1-5. It will be characterized by a proud rejection of God's authority in favor of selfish individualism and superficial worship. Isn't that what we see today? Like the Corinthians (4:19-21), we need to repent.