

The Bread of Sincerity and Truth
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Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:8)

How are we to deal correctly with a verse such as this? How do we let the verse speak for itself? Or, express its truth? Is it legitimate to suppose that this verse can be applied validly to the feast to the reunited brothers? And then is it possible for it to be applied to our selves?

Let's parse, break down and analyze verse 8. It occurs in the exhortative section of this letter. And, specifically, it is dealing with participation in the Lord's Supper in a context where the transgression of Reuben¹ has reoccurred in first century Corinth. An act of sexual immorality, such **as is not even named** (*let alone practiced!*) **among Gentiles!** (v. 1)—Reuben committed incestuous adultery with Jacob's wife, defiling his father's bed, himself as well as her. Paul is horrified. And the implication is that Christians should be horrified, too. But instead, **they are puffed up** (v.2), proud of their enlightened tolerance . . . **they have not mourned that he who has done this deed** (a member of the church at Corinth) **might be taken away from among you.** Paul means that this transgressor should be excommunicated, and that the church should purify itself from this egregious breach of God's Law.

I have moved from v. 8, **the leaven of malice and wickedness**, to the report of incestuous adultery to demonstrate that the correct handling of a verse requires its placement with the context of exhortation about keeping the church pure and above reproach. Back in the historical setting of Genesis 43, where the reunited brothers are **breaking bread together** the matter of whether the bread they are sharing is leaven (**with malice and wickedness**) or unleavened bread (with **sincerity and truth**). There is a huge, real disparity between these two options—the leaven and the unleavened—wider perhaps than the disparity between two textual settings (one historical and one exhortative/moral), this later disparity exacerbated by time, meaning the passage of time, 1,500 years approximately.

If we have any hope of properly exegeting 1 Cor. 5:8—and of recognizing what proper exegeting entails, we must pay attention to the context, to the surrounding text. We must understand the theme and intent of the larger passage, too. That means specifically, verse 8 must be kept in the setting of 1

¹ Whether or not this is the intent of the scribal break, it is clear that 1 Chronicles relates to the event mentioned in Gen 35:22. "Defiled his father's bed" reflects "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine."

Cor. 5-6:11. What holds this passage together is the focus on **the leaven of malice and wickedness** which informs the incestuous adultery, the matter of the church disciplining its own, and the proceeding with lawsuits to settle differences inside the church with **the unrighteous**, or pagan civil authorities!! Even **the least esteemed in the church**, being acquainted with **sincerity and truth**, could provide better adjudication than those who have no idea of the importance of **sincerity**, or the meaning of **truth**! A “jury trial of one’s peers,” for the Christian, must consist of other Christians—just a practical side note.

1 Cor. 6:9 reads **Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.** One exercises care in the handling of Scripture, by proper exegesis! It is essential that we know what that is, what it looks like. Applied to Genesis 43-44 this means that Joseph’s/Jacob’s family cannot be truly reunited, to reconciled until the **leaven of malice and wickedness** is discarded, and the **unleavened bread of sincerity and truth** has replaced it at the table. That is why Joseph has conceived, planned and is determined to implement the test of the silver cup! Do his brothers prefer unleavened to leaven bread! We might draw a comparison to gluten-free bread. To those who are gluten intolerant, gluten is poisonous—and the allergic response is akin to moral defilement. A little immorality, a little **malice and wickedness**, sickens the whole person! A purging, or cleansing of the digestive track/body is necessary for health to return.

Do not be deceived, according to Albert Barnes, appears here (6:9) because the Corinthians are in danger of being deceived. And misguided love, or false compassion in their own hearts, is capable of self-deception! They are, as we are, prone to be deceived by our own false opinions on subjects such as incestuous adultery. What if they are consenting adults? What if they are in love and are committed to each other in relationship? *How does that even matter? We are addressing a transgression of God’s Law in the church²!*

It follows then that we acknowledge a particular sexual sin is embedded in **malice and wickedness**—just as **malice and wickedness** informed the treachery of Joseph’s brothers, all those years ago. And their sin has sat and festered all the intervening years! The question now is; are they willing to confront and repent? *Do they want to be godly? Is godliness their main business and focus? Is that the case for the couple in Corinth? Is that our own focus?* We ask this because glorifying God and growth in godliness are the twin purposes for which we were created, for which we ought to strive! **Godliness in all our affections, pervading our entire being and commanding all our**

² We also recognize that Christians can be deceived by teachers who are immersed in sexual immorality themselves, and hesitant to do due diligence when it comes to church discipline. One of the errors they perpetuated is that they, or those who practice such things “*might be saved*.” What the Word says is that those who continue in sin and not “brothers and sisters” and should not be treated as such.

actions—that's the divine design. Just whose team are these brothers on? *That's the pertinent question.* And that is what Joseph has plans to discover.

The second main point in Barnes' Notes emphasizes that there is no necessity for anyone to be deceived—all are capable of establishing and knowing the truth. Not only can we, must we! Is it not plain to all, that those who persist in sin are very likely not saved? And should consideration of the infinite value of the individual souls ("worth ten thousand worlds") not urge us to warn others that the loss of heaven is an infinite loss and that to inherit hell (with all its suffering and woes) is something to avoid?!

Keeping v.8 in context means reviewing what comes after as well as that which comes before. Listen in to 1 Cor. 5:9-13 again:

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; 10 I *did* not at all *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world. 11 But [a]actually, I [b]wrote to you not to associate [c]with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what *business* of mine *is it* to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? 13 But those who are outside, God [d]judges. Remove the evil person from among yourselves.

Footnotes

- a. 1 Corinthians 5:11 Lit *now*
- b. 1 Corinthians 5:11 Or *have written*
- c. 1 Corinthians 5:11 Lit *together if anyone called a brother is*
- d. 1 Corinthians 5:13 Or *will judge*

Knowing that this is an in-house communication, we avoid the mistake of thinking that Paul's warnings apply outside of the church setting. And, in Genesis 43-44, we have a similar dynamic because Jacob's family is the family of God, is the church, so to speak therefore what Joseph is doing with, and doing to his family is to be framed restrictively—its first level of application is God's chosen family. Imagine, Joseph is sold for silver . . . and now Joseph's silver cup is the catalyst for self-disclosure! Two hundred shekels of silver were key in the sin of Achan. The "see, covet, take" transgression of Eve and Adam is replicated in Joseph's story—that's rather the point. And the same is true of the partners in the incestuous adultery that prompted Paul's rebuke!

Notice also that the same sin cluster (or, wickedness) is repeated, and clarified: **the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and**

swindlers, or with idolaters (v. 9) in verse **11 But actually, I [b]wrote to you not to associate with any *so-called brother* if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person.**

Paul has added **revilers** (those who are verbally abusive—who are reproachful, coarse, railers, slanderers who use harsh, bitter and hurtful words) and **extortioners** (those who take more than is there due, also translated, **ravishers** (who violate rights, as rapists) and **robbers** (who steal what belongs to others, who oppress the poor, detain the wages of workers and extort unlawful gain). What does this expansion drive home? It drives home the point that sexual immorality is part of a wider web, a web of wickedness which is its domain, its setting. SO when Paul says **the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven**—he has all this in view and so should we.

Keeping the church pure/holy/and godly is critical. Christians are not patrons of evil, the intemperate, not partners with the wicked! We do not live so as to scandalize the name of Christ, or to the dishonor of God. And we achieve that by exercising church discipline, and by withdrawing from fellowship with workers of iniquity—yes, from so-called brothers! And we are kind to those outside, leaving God to judge them as we examine ourselves to walk righteously—encouraging and exhorting one another! This self-examination is what determines that we are unleavened bread indeed.

Amen.