

**Title:** Arrogant Sin in the Church Family

**Truth:** Deal with sin—don't overlook it.

**Date/Location:** Sunday April 26, 2020 at FBC

## **Introduction**

Things were bad in Corinth: the people were arrogantly boasting about one minister over another (4:6). But there was something else that was even worse.

### **I. Pride and Paul's Coming, 4:18-21**

A. Arrogant—puffed up. The arrogant attitude in Corinth was a huge problem. Not only in 4:6, but also 4:18, 19, 5:2, 8:1, and the implication of 1 Cor. 13:4 that they had were not behaving in a loving manner toward one another.

Because of the repeated word “puffed up” in 4:18-19 and 5:2, I have started a new section at 4:18 and included it with the following chapter.

B. The absence of Paul, *combined with* the expectation that he is not going to come back, has given the people in Corinth a false sense of security in their sin. Accountability is gone and not coming back, so they feel that it is OK to drop into a mindset of “do whatever I want to do and think however I want to think.” While the cat is away, the mice will play! But if the cat comes back, things will get bad.

C. **Apply:** This absence of a spiritual leader that Paul speaks of is connected, at least in the mind of this author, to our present lockdown situation. We are apart from one another. When you get away from other Christians—not just apostles or missionaries or pastors—it is easy to slip into sinful patterns. If we get farther and farther from real personal connections, accountability is lost.

**Illustrate:** It's like an online-only interaction. You can be another person in your tweets and bold in your words—or even in your sin—in the anonymous world of the Internet. But get face to face with a serious Christian friend or pastor, converse with them about things, and you will instantly feel differently about what you are doing. If you are in sin, such interactions will hopefully bring to your heart a feeling of shame, and a corrective nudge to move in the godly direction.

This is why Hebrews 10:24-25 says that we need to exhort one another—and all the more as we see the day approaching.

- D. The Apostle Paul breaks the bad news that he *will* come soon to see them (God willing, of course). Then Paul will see about the boasting words of those who are arrogant in the church and causing the problems mentioned earlier (and also what is coming up in chapter 5). He is going to see not just their words, but the power of their words and behavior. He will see if they have enough “oomph” to actually *live* the Christian life. Evidently they do not, because the church is a mess. So Paul will see that and know that their words are empty, powerless things that have no energy to effect salvation or sanctification. For all their emphasis on powerful speech and powerful speakers, they have little reality to back it up.
- E. Paul concludes chapter 4 in this warning mode of “I’m coming.” He tells the believers by way of a rhetorical question that they have a choice as to how Paul will conduct himself in his visit. Either he will come with a loving and gentle spirit, or he will come with a rod of discipline. Humility on their part will guarantee a nice visit; arrogance will guarantee a disciplinary visit.
- F. We should keep in mind a couple of things.
1. Paul did eventually make this visit, and it was a painful and unpleasant experience according to the retrospective statement of 2 Cor. 2:1. The precise timeline of this visit is not a concern for our purposes in this message—it is enough to know that it happened. It apparently had a beneficial effect (2 Cor. 7:9). Another visit was planned, according to 2 Cor. 12:21 and 13:2, and it was a bit up in the air as to whether it was going to be a nice one or not.
  2. Paul had apostolic authority and miraculous power at his disposal that sometimes came out in disciplinary ways. For example, Acts 13:11 records how he pronounced a judgment of blindness on Elymas, a sorcerer. Peter had something similar as seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). In these cases, the authority to pronounce judgment came from God. This was rare.
  3. Other times, probably more frequent but less easily observable, God directly judged a person or persons for being out of line in the church. We will see this in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30.

## **II. Immorality in the Church, 5:1-6**

- A. Bad becomes worse when we arrive in chapter 5. The arrogance of the people in the church was not only limited to their elevation of one

minister over the other. They were also puffed up about an even more obvious sin in their midst.

1. "It is reported" is similar to 1:11 where Paul had heard a report from Chloe's household about the factions in the church. These reports would be easy enough to debunk, if they were false reports. Clearly they were true.
2. Verse 5 tells us that they were not sad about the sin of gross sexual immorality by one of their members. And they weren't void of feeling either. They actually were *proud* and so *carnal* that they were able to excuse the immorality and carry on without a twinge of conscience. This is such a worldly attitude that it is hard for a faithful believer to understand in some way. Worldly people are supportive of sinful behavior. They encourage such behavior (Romans 1:32).

B. This arrogant attitude blinded them from seeing several critical things.

1. They failed to see their own deception about future judgment. In their arrogance, they deceived themselves into thinking that there is no accountability, no judgment, and no penalty for sin. Life is all about themselves and their pleasures. Since they are applauding others, you might surmise (often accurately) that they do so in order to comfort themselves in their own lifestyle of wicked behavior. Perhaps this was coupled with a licentious attitude: "Let us do sin that grace may abound," or "It is just the physical body...God will forgive because he knows we are weak that way..."
2. They failed to see that they had to remove this person from the church, 5:2-5. This process is most commonly called "church discipline." It is a corrective action taken by the church in its role of representing God and His righteousness on the earth. It is the ministry of the church toward unrepentant sinning members, to help them see the urgent need for repentance. It is a ministry of the church for its own benefit as well, to purify the church and protect it from further impurity flooding in. Matthew 18:15-20 is the single best passage that deals with the responsibility and authority of the church in removing a member of the church for unrepentant sin. Carefully note the following:
  1. The process: confront alone, two or three witnesses, the church, and finally removal from the church, if it gets to this point. This is not limited to a private process. The first step is, but the subsequent steps are not. If we are to obey Scripture in such cases, we must observe Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 5:4 "when you are gathered together." This is why I have harped on the fact that the pastor of a church cannot

add members unilaterally, and he cannot remove them unilaterally. He cannot “put someone on discipline for 6 months” on his own accord. That is silly, popish, and unbiblical. This also means that you, the church member, are involved in this process. You have to be strong enough, wise enough, Spirit-led enough, to be able to handle it. You can’t let emotions and friendships and “piety” lead you to disobey what the Lord clearly teaches us here.

2. The goal: if he listens, you have gained your brother (reconciliation). At any stage in the process above this can occur, and it is what we hope and pray will occur.
3. The outcome in the case of persistent unrepentance: The church is to regard the person as how they are behaving, an unredeemed sinner. That means the person is not participating in the Lord’s Table, and things don’t go on as normal. We pray for them, evangelize them, and exhort them to repent. The practical result of this is that fellowship is broken and distance is put in place.
4. The divinely ordained authority of the church: When the properly-operating church makes a statement as it does in a case of removing an unrepentant member, it is sadly saying that the person is not in a right relationship with God, and thus with the church as well.

Matt. 18:18 refers to the declaratory authority that the church has. If the church has carefully examined the case and determines the person is unrepentant, then that is a reflection of how God sees it. It is not that the church convinces God of that; rather, that God has led the church to see what reality is. See also Matt. 16:19 and John 20:23. This ought to scare anyone, because they are not allowed to live on in a state of proud denial, like the Corinthians in their arrogance, that all is or will be well. It is NOT well if you don’t repent.

5. The goal is still to see the person come to a right relationship with God and fellow man. 1 Cor. 5:5 says that after the person is removed, they are “delivered to Satan” for the destruction of the flesh—discipline to get the person’s attention and ultimately bring them to salvation before the Day of the Lord comes.
3. The Corinthians failed to understand that a little sin infects the whole church. A little sin in your life impacts your whole life. It impacts my whole life. In some way, sin spreads like yeast in a batch of dough.

4. They failed to see the heinousness of sin. Circle back around to them being puffed up. No sadness? No humility? No concern for the church's well-being? No concern that the unrepentant sinner might be in danger?

### **III. Church Cleaning Ministry, 5:7-8**

- A. The command is to purge or "clean out" the old leaven, that is, their old arrogant, carnal approach. Sin is far worse than stinky kitchen trash, but we can be more energetic about putting out the trash than we are about putting out the sin!
- B. Paul counseled them to clean out the sin so that they would be like Christ and fit for worship to this perfect sacrifice of unleavened bread. Malice toward other people (chapters 1-4?) and wickedness in the church (chapter 5 thus far) have no place in the life of the believer or the life of the church, particularly at the Lord's Table. In place of these, we need sincerity and truth. As I have alluded to above, but want to make direct, removal of sin from the church happens in two ways:
  1. Repentance by the sinner. This is the best way. Really, it is something that should be going on all the time amongst ourselves privately and in our interactions with others.
  2. Removal of the unrepentant sinner. This is highly unpleasant but necessary in the case of a stubborn person.
- C. The language of the "feast" evokes the Lord's Table, representing our connection to Christ through His finished work on the cross. His Body and blood were offered so that he would redeem us from every evil work and purify us for Himself a people zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).

### **Conclusion**

The problems of arrogance and blatant sin are among the reasons that Paul called upon the Corinthians to examine themselves (2 Cor. 13:5) to see if they are actually in the faith. Unrepentantly persisting in these kinds of behaviors would be solid evidence against true conversion.

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