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“You Really Are Unleavened”:

Community Identity, Violation, and Restoration in 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

Introduction

1 Corinthians 5:1-8 addresses a particularly failure of sexual immorality in the community at Corinth. In the process, Paul also continuously points the Corinthians toward their radically new, counter-cultural identity as the church. This identity is formed by the OT tradition of law and story, the powerful work of the Spirit, and by the saving work of Christ on the cross. This paper will explore 1 Cor 5:1-8, highlighting the many ways Paul points to a unique community identity and calls upon Christians to protect this identity against the contaminating effects of arrogance and immorality.

Context within 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 5:1-8 begins a lengthy section of Paul’s letter in which he addresses challenges specific to the congregation at Corinth. Having spent 1 Cor 1:1-9 reminding the Corinthians of their true identity, and calling them in 1-3 to be unified on the basis of that identity, Paul wraps up his early arguments in chapter 4 by pointing to his own apostleship as both a model of humble service and a fatherly correction to the community. He ends this chapter with a word of caution: “I am not writing to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. . . . What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?”¹ (1 Cor 4:14, 21). Though his mention of “a stick” may seem harsh, the behavior he identifies in 1 Cor 5

¹ This and all quotations from the NRSV unless noted.

and subsequent chapters reveal the extent to which the Corinthians' spiritual arrogance threatens the cohesion and witness of the community.

Paul's call for expulsion of the sinning man in 1 Cor 5 and may initially seem a sharp departure from the fatherly tone which ends 1 Cor 4. However, similarities in language clearly link the two chapters. The abrupt change of topic in 1 Cor 5:1 is linguistically connected to the previous chapter through Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians' spiritual pride in 5:2, when he marvels, "and you are arrogant!" The same term for "arrogant"² is used three times in the previous chapter (4:6, 18, 19), demonstrating the cohesiveness of Paul's argument: the community's response to the man's sexual immorality reveals the depth of arrogance plaguing the church of Corinth. Thus 1 Cor 5 organically flows from the previous chapters as another example of Paul's apostolic and fatherly corrective to the threat of arrogance in the Corinthian church.

The case of sexual immorality in 5:1-8 is structurally linked to the issues of lawsuits in 6:1-11 and prostitution in 6:12-20, suggesting the three form a connected unit of critiques. Flowing from the previous chapters, these critiques highlight several particularly egregious ways in which the Corinthians' spiritual arrogance is manifesting in the church, to the detriment of its mission and fellowship. By contrast with chapters 7-15 which follow, Paul addresses the incidents in 5-6 concisely and straightforwardly; they do not require the lengthy ethical reasoning devoted to household relations, meat

² The NRSV, ESV, and NIV translates this as "puffed up" in 4:6 but as "arrogant" elsewhere. However, the NKJV retains "puffed up" in all usages, which is closer to the plain sense of the term. Though the term is used multiple times in 1 Corinthians, it occurs only once elsewhere in the NT (Col 2:18), indicating its significance as a particular problem in Corinth. David Garland suggests that Paul uses this term as a subtle rebuttal of the Corinthians' self-perception as *pneumatikoi*, "spiritual ones," noting that *pneuma*, "spirit," also means "wind." His repeated use of the term may indicate that thought the Corinthians think they are uniquely full of the Spirit, they are instead merely puffed up with the wind. David E Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 273, Scribd Ebook.

sacrificed to idols, or orderly worship. Further, these passages contain the following structural and thematic similarities:

- Each points to the Corinthians' behavior being noticed by their unbelieving neighbors (5:1, 6:6, 6:18-20).
- Each denotes a failure of right judgment on the part of the community, with a corresponding corrective and reference to the Deuteronomic code (5:13, 6:4, 6:18).
- Each affirms an eschatological hope of some kind. In 5:5, this hope is expressed as the offending man's spirit being "saved in the day of the Lord"; in 6:2, as saints judging the world and angels; and in 6:14, as the bodily resurrection.³

These characteristics may help explain Paul's relatively brief and straightforward treatment of the issues of incest, lawsuits, and prostitution in 5:1-6:20. Each is a highly public departure from a community identity which finds its origin in the OT people of God and its destiny in the eschaton. Though this paper will only look examine 5:1-8, its context within the larger set of offenses from 5:1-6:20 is significant for understanding how Paul understands community boundaries in Corinth, particularly as they are shaped by the story of Israel, the power of the Spirit, and the cross of Christ.

Exegesis

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?

³ Garland, 268.

A report of grave sexual immorality (5:1) has reached Paul in Ephesus, perhaps by way of “Chloe’s people” (1:11) or by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17): “a man is living with his father’s wife.” The NIV translates this verse less euphemistically: “a man is sleeping with his father’s wife.” The language of “father’s wife” echoes that of Lev 18:7-8, which forbids sexual relations with one’s “father’s wife” (18:8) as distinct from one’s “mother” (18:7), leading most commentators to conclude that Paul is referring to a stepmother, or possibly even a concubine.⁴ Because the nature of the offense is referred to as “sexual immorality” (*porneia*) rather than “adultery,” many commenters reasonably presume the man’s father is no longer alive.⁵

The Greek usage of *porneia* in Paul’s day was an umbrella term for all sexual fornication that did *not* violate the honor of respectable women (virgins, wives, and widows; violation of these women’s honor fell into the unlawful category of adultery). Such fornication included a wide range of sexual activities with concubines, slaves, and prostitutes (both male and female). Unlike adultery, such fornication was viewed as an ordinary part of urban Greek sexual life in the Roman Empire; a vice, but a useful one that provided a sexual outlet believed to prevent the more grievous sin of adultery.⁶ However, Paul uses the term *porneia* in 1 Corinthians to describe sexual relations outside the boundary of marital monogamy (5:1, 6:13,18 and, more explicitly, 7:2), as well as elsewhere in his letters to denote off-limits sexual transgressions of various

⁴ Christopher Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 152. See also Will Deming, “The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), 294.

⁵ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 219-221.

⁶ Kyle Harper, “Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 2 (2012): 371-3.

kinds (cf. 2 Cor 12:21, Gal 5:19, Eps 5:3, Col 3:5, 1 Thess 4:3).⁷ This NT usage makes clear that Paul has infused the term with Jewish sexual ethics' emphases on marital fidelity, non-exploitation, and community purity.⁸ In this manner, Paul is beginning to outline a uniquely Christian sexual ethics for Gentile converts that departs from Greek societal norms and is rooted in OT ethics.⁹

Interestingly, in 5:1 the offending man is not named, the woman receives no attention whatsoever,¹⁰ and no further details of the offense are provided, leaving the strong impression that Paul's chief concern is not the act of sexual immorality itself, but the community's response to it. The first hint of this concern appears in 5:1b, when Paul notes that this kind of immorality "is not found even among pagans." On the surface, this critique of the man's behavior demonstrates its particularly egregious nature; it was even outside the sexual mores of the notoriously hyper-sexualized pagan culture of ancient Corinth. Such an assertion points to the public nature of this sin and its compromise of the church's distinctive witness to its pagan contemporaries. But beneath this plain reading, Paul also points to something far more profound. His term for "pagans" is simply his usual term for Gentiles, and in using it to denote those outside the church at Corinth—a church largely comprised of Gentile converts—he is subtly emphasizing the reality of their new identity.¹¹ They who are inside the church are no

⁷ Garland, 279.

⁸ Harper, 373.

⁹ Harper, 376-8.

¹⁰ Most commentators surmise the woman must not be a member of the church, since no correction is directed at her behavior. Fee notes that women were more often blamed for sexual sins than men in Paul's day, despite their relative lack of sexual agency (see, for example, the story of the adulterous woman in John 8:1-11); therefore, her omission strongly lends credence to the notion that she was not a Christian. Fee, 220; see also Hays, 80-81, and Garland, 281.

¹¹ Hays, 80.

longer Gentiles at all, but have been brought within the boundary of God's covenant people (the same people to whom the Levitical law referenced in 5:1 was given).

This new identity is underscored in 1 Cor 12:2, which reminds them of a time "when [they] were pagans," that is, a time when they did not yet confess Christ as Lord by the power of the Spirit. Paul makes the point again in 12:13: "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."¹² In other words, the Gentile Corinthians' new identification with the body of Christ by the Spirit is so strong as to render them no longer Gentiles at all, but part of the covenant people of God. The scorn of the Gentile outsiders in 5:1 underlines this new reality. As such, it also points to the deeper problem of sexual immorality in the church as a violation of the Corinthians' true identity. Paul will unpack this theme further in subsequent verses, pointing to the remarkable new spiritual reality that the Corinthians inhabit.

The man's sexual immorality undercuts the Corinthians' new identity and its related sexual ethics; however, Paul's chief concern seems to be Corinthians' response, not the man's sin. The word "arrogant" in 5:2 connects echoes the previous chapter's cautions against Corinthian arrogance, as described earlier. The source of their arrogance cannot be plainly derived from the text, but the broader context of 1 Corinthians suggest two possible readings. First, that the Corinthians' arrogance reflects the contradiction between their positive self-conception and the flagrant sin in their midst; or second, that their arrogance evidences a theological error equating spirituality with sexual liberty. Of these possible readings, the former seems more plausible; one

¹² Galatians 3:28 states even more plainly: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

would assume Paul would go to great lengths to correct a libertine theological error rather than passing over it as he does.¹³ Whatever the source of the Corinthians' arrogance, however, Paul's astonishment reveals that it is unwarranted. Instead, an appropriate response to such sexual immorality ought to be mourning and removal of the man from their fellowship. The sort of mourning that Paul likely has in view is "the kind of deep anguish of should frequently related to true repentance"¹⁴; such a response appropriately recognizes the tragedy of sin in the midst of a community called to be the dwelling place of a holy God (cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17).

Two aspects of 5:2 bear special notice: 1) Paul's expectation of corporate grief; and 2) his linkage of corporate grief with expulsion of sin. Fee, Hays, and Garland all note that Paul's call for communal mourning reflects a deeply scriptural worldview. Throughout the history of God's people, offense by one member of the community contaminates the entire body, and the body responds with a grieving acknowledgement of corporate guilt, corporate repentance, and renewed commitment to corporate purity.¹⁵ That the Corinthians do not respond to egregious sexual sin in their midst of their "temple" (3:16) with cries of corporate repentance demonstrates their lack of understanding of their identity as God's holy people. "It is this lack of both a sense of sin, and therefore of any ethical consequences to their life in the Spirit, that marks the Corinthian brand of 'spirituality' as radically different from that which flows out of the

¹³ Garland, 285.

¹⁴ Fee, 222.

¹⁵ Fee compares this pattern to Isaiah's encounter with the exalted Lord in the temple, responding with the trisagion, personal and national repentance, and instinctively pleading for the removal of his sin.. Hays similarly points to patterns of national mourning and purifying throughout the OT: Josh 7; Ezra 9:6-15, 10:6; Neh 9:6-37; Dan 9:4-19; and others. Fee, 222-3; Hays, 82; Garland, 289-90.

gospel of Christ crucified.”¹⁶ When seen in this light, Paul’s exclamation, “And you are arrogant!” reveals a shocking and tragic abdication of the Corinthians’ identity as God’s people. Paul’s implicit connection between the Corinthian church and the OT pattern of national mourning is made explicit in 5:13, when he cites Deut 17:7: “Drive the wicked person out from among you.”

1 Corinthians 5:3-5

3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment 4 in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

The previous verses highlight the failure of the Corinthians to respond appropriately to sin in their midst. By contrast, 5:3-4 shifts the focus to Paul himself and his decisive judgment on the sinning man. Rather than an arrogant assertion of Paul’s superior response, these verses exemplify his fatherly admonition in 4:15-16: “Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I appeal to you then, be imitators of me.” The Corinthians have faltered in their understanding of their identity and have failed to respond accordingly, but Paul offers them himself—mystically present with them by the Spirit¹⁷—clearly demonstrating how they must proceed. The mystery of the spiritual cohesion of the body of Christ across time and space permeates 1 Corinthians. In 6:17, Paul explains that, “anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him”; in 12:12-13 he describes the church as a transcendent spiritual reality made up of many members; and in 14:14-15, he the possibility of a spiritual reality that goes

¹⁶ Fee, 223.

¹⁷ The promise of his presence may be a subtle response to those who, according to 4:18, claimed that Paul was not coming to visit Corinth and thus “have become arrogant.” In some mystical sense, Paul has visited them again in the spirit.

beyond the acts of his physical body. Taken together, these passages help to explain the significance of Paul's claim to be "present in the spirit" by the "power of our Lord Jesus" (3,4). Paul is not pointing to a vague psychological experience similar to the modern sense of being with others "in spirit," a sort of wishful longing to be together. In some meaningful way that challenges contemporary understanding, Paul is truly and powerfully present in spirit by virtue of his union with the Corinthians in the body of Christ. This sense of presence is heightened when one remembers that 1 Corinthians was a letter intended to be read aloud, the Spirit communicating "his prophetic-apostolic ministry in their midst."¹⁸

His presence among them thus established, Paul now turns to action. The severity of the man's sin and the inappropriateness of Corinthian arrogance call for judgment. In 5:5, Paul clearly exhorts them to expel the man: "hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." Though interpretations of this verse have varied, its ending makes clear Paul's intent that the expulsion be restorative. This plain reading excludes the possibility that Paul is calling for the man's death,¹⁹ and also makes unlikely any allusion to God's handing over of Job to Satan for physical torment (cf. Job 2:6). Neither interpretation supports the intended remediation explicitly stated in 5b, nor Paul's consistent concern in the chapter with the health of the community above the particular recourse for an individual's sin. A more likely interpretation, then, is that the community is to turn the

¹⁸ Fee, 225.

¹⁹ The notion that Paul is commanding turning the man over to Satan to be killed, similar to God's punishment of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11, was the dominant view of the 20th century according to Fee, 230. For an example of such an argument, see Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 154. Marshall notes some commentators take this passage so far as to read it as Paul's commendation of capital punishment, 153.

man out from the sheltering care of the Christian community—a community profoundly marked by its new identity in Christ, as already hinted at in previous verses—into the dominion of Satan, the destructive realm of “those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18).²⁰ Notably, patristic interpretation saw 5:5 as metaphorical, not literal. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia writes, “This is not to be taken literally. What Paul means is that the person concerned should be put out of the church and forced to live in the world, which is ruled by Satan. That way he will learn to fear God and escape the greater punishment that is to come.”²¹ Similarly, Severian of Gabala argues that Satan’s domain in 5:5 refers to “diseases, sorrows, sufferings, and other circumstances . . . the hardships of this life.”²² The church fathers’ cultural and historical proximity to Paul’s Corinth, relative to modern interpreters, makes their figurative interpretation all the more preferable to the modern reading of 5:5 as a death sentence.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

6 Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Here, Paul turns to an intriguing use of OT imagery to further explain his call for expulsion, likening the removal of the sinning man to the removal of leaven from the home, an annual Passover ritual prescribed in Exodus 12:1-17. Leaven in this case was akin to sourdough starter. Every week of the year, when Jewish households prepared a

²⁰ Fee, Hays, and Garland all support this more figurative interpretation. See also Eph 6:12, which describes the struggle against Satan as one “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

²¹ Gerald Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, ACCS (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 45.

²² Ibid.

new loaf of bread, they would keep back a bit of the dough, allow it to ferment, and use it to leaven the next week's loaf.²³ In this manner, every loaf of bread was intermingled with the same original leaven, providing a powerful metaphor for sin's capacity to spread, contaminate, and grow. Though the initial analogy likens the sinning man to leaven, Paul expands its range in 5:6, 8 to include "boasting" and "malice and evil"—all the Corinthians' arrogance, division, and flagrant sins are within its ferment and in need of cleansing. Mitchell notes that the language of a leavened lump is, quite literally, dough that has been "puffed up"—the same imagery used in 4:6, 18-19 and 5:2—and that early commentaries also imagined this fermenting lump as a festering growth on the body of Christ, appealing to another Pauline metaphor.²⁴

Once a year, however, in preparation for their Passover observance, Jewish households discarded the fermented leaven and baked a fresh, unleavened loaf of bread on the same day as the slaughter of the Passover lamb, symbolic representations of their identity as God's holy and rescued people. In 5:6-6, Paul enfolds the Corinthian church into this communal identity of holiness and deliverance. The expulsion prescribed to the sinning man in 5:5 becomes a generalized call to all Corinthians to expel "the old yeast," to live as a holy "new batch." Paul appeals to the central redemption story of Israel, the Passover, to explain the Corinthians' identity as holy people. However, here Paul makes a remarkable Christological departure: "Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed." The Corinthians do not *become* holy by cleaning out their "leaven"; they clean out their leaven because they have *already* been

²³ Fee, 237.

²⁴ Michell, 229.

made holy by the sacrificial death of Christ. The Corinthians have already received God's gracious deliverance through Christ's sacrificial death, and therefore Paul's call to communal holiness is simply a call to become who they already are.²⁵ The reminder that the Corinthian church "really [is] unleavened" infuses the entire chapter with grace and underlines that which has only been hinted at until this point. The Corinthians are heirs of Israel's story, recipients of God's moral law (5:1,13), no longer Gentiles (5:1), delivered from Satan's dominion of oppression and death (5:5), and now being formed into a holy temple (3:16), a spiritual body (12:13), a new batch of dough (5:7).²⁶ Their communal life is to be marked by celebration in "sincerity and truth" (5:8), a continuous festival of Christ's finished work on their behalf. Seen in this light, the call to expel the sexually immoral man is less a matter of punishment than of restoring the community to its true identity as a prophetic community receiving its life from God's Spirit, living by a distinctive Christian ethic informed by OT law and realized on the cross.

Application and Conclusion

At the time of writing, my denomination is under scrutiny for its failure to appropriately address sexual immorality in its midst: multiple allegations of sexual abuse of women and children by a lay catechist which went undisclosed by church leaders for

²⁵ Fee, 239.

²⁶ Michael Daise extends the Exodus narrative to 1 Cor 10 and 16. 1 Cor 5 evokes the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread of Ex 12; 1 Cor 10:1, 3, and 4 evoke the cloud, Red Sea, manna, and water from the rock of Ex 13-17, respectively; and Paul's reference to Pentecost in 1 Cor 16 concludes the Jewish festival cycle. Though Dais' interest is liturgical, not exegetical, his work provides an intriguingly cohesive overview of Paul's inclusion of the Corinthians into Israel's Exodus story. Dais, "Christ Our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)," *Neot testamentica* Vol. 50, No. 2 (2016), 519.

several years.²⁷ Though the details are not public and the circumstances are different from those of 1 Cor 5, certain parallels can be made. For example, the revulsion expressed by unbelievers on social media mirrors that of the pagans in 5:1, and the charges of mishandling, secrecy, and institutional failure mirror those of “arrogance” in 5:2. This example is not intended to pass premature judgment in an ongoing investigation, but merely to demonstrate that the pattern of 1 Cor 5 sadly continues in the modern church. Egregious sexual sin coupled with community arrogance continues to ferment as a powerful “leaven” in the church, undermining its legitimacy, tarnishing its witness, and contaminating the entire lump with spiritual harm. Hays makes a similar application in his commentary:

Only recently has the church begun to acknowledge instances of sexual abuse of women and children by church leaders and members. The example of 1 Corinthians 5 should encourage us to name such violations for what they are and to exercise swift and severe discipline upon the offenders. Insofar as the church has failed in the past to deal forthrightly with such matters, it has been complicit in a conspiracy of silence.²⁸

Seen through the modern lens of sexual abuse in the church—an issue grievously close to home—one can more easily recognize the wisdom in Paul’s injunction to expel notorious sexual sinners for the protection, health, and identity of the community. Such an act does not preclude the excluded member’s remediation, as in 5:5, but entrusts it to God while concerning itself primarily with the restoration of the community. Interestingly, Paul’s call for swift judgment, prompt expulsion, a thorough

²⁷ Kathryn Post, “Prominent Anglican bishop takes leave of absence amid ongoing accusations of mishandling abuse allegations,” *Religion News Service*, July 9, 2021. <https://religionnews.com/2021/07/09/prominent-anglican-bishop-takes-leave-of-absence-amid-ongoing-accusations-of-mishandling-abuse-allegations/>

²⁸ Hays, 89-90.

housecleaning (cf. 1 Cor 5:7), and “sincerity and truth” aligns with widely acknowledged best practices for organizations in the face of sexual abuse allegations.²⁹

But what about less obvious cases of notorious sexual immorality? How applicable is expulsion to less clear-cut examples in our contemporary context; e.g., couples who cohabit before marriage, or lobbyists whose firms engage in dishonest political maneuvering? How do church leaders draw appropriate boundaries around community identity while avoiding legalism and retaining the gracious emphasis on Jesus’ sufficiency so powerfully evoked in 1 Cor 5:7? While some have used this passage to argue for a system of church discipline, Fee rightly cautions against over-universalizing what is “an *ad hoc* case of church discipline,” given the passage’s many interpretive complexities and ambiguities.³⁰ However, even without deriving a comprehensive, prescriptive system of church discipline from 1 Cor 5:1-8, the passage is sufficiently clear on several principles with broad applicability.

First, the integrity of the Christian community and its public witness is not the sole responsibility of offending individuals, but of the whole community. Corporate grief, repentance, and cleansing are appropriate responses by the entire community to the sins of individuals, as has always been the pattern of communal responsibility in the OT. 1 Cor 5:1-8 clearly supports such a reading, and thus issues a challenge to, for example, those in the contemporary American church who resist appeals for corporate lament or repentance for the racism of past Christians. The sins of individuals are the responsibility of the community; a little leaven contaminates the entire lump.

²⁹ For recent examples of best practices in church settings, see Scot McKnight, *A Church Called Tov* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2020) and Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2020).

³⁰ Fee, 234.

Second, the intended purpose for church discipline is restorative, not punitive (5:5); it is an act of eschatological hope in Jesus' deliverance of his people. For such restoration to be practically effective requires a community of remarkable safety, love, goodness, and spiritual power, such that exclusion from it "could be a genuinely redemptive process."³¹ Sadly, such a community is hard to imagine in our contemporary context, when a disciplined member might simply begin worshiping at another church or forgo corporate worship altogether. The difficulty of imagining restorative discipline issues a challenging indictment of contemporary church culture, one that leaders would do well to contemplate.

Finally, Paul's call to communal purity is an invitation to reclaim the church's true identity and its place in the grand story of God's redemption. The church is the inheritor of Israel's rich scriptural heritage, of law and story and imagery that powerfully points to the saving work of Christ on the cross and to the ethical contours of covenantal community. Paul's invitation to sexual morality in 1 Cor 5 is part of his broader purpose throughout 1 Corinthians to help the Corinthians understand their unique Christian identity within the pagan world from which they have been delivered. Through repeated appeals to the OT and to the cross, Paul helps the Christians at Corinth—and today—to "see the world in dramatically new ways, in light of values shaped by the Christian story."³²

³¹ 235.

³² Hays, 11.

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