

## The Need to Judge

“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?” (1 Corinthians 5:12, ESV)

Each of us is encouraged to have our own convictions between ourselves and the Lord and none of us should pass judgment or despise one another for those convictions. (cf. Rom. 14:10) Nevertheless, there are other times when we must gird up and judge those within the church. (cf. 1 Cor. 5:12) When matters of sin arise, scripture tells us that we are not free to sit idly but must act to preserve.

Paul received an update on happenings at the church at Corinth and was surprised at what he learned: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.” (1 Cor. 5:1) If this were simply a matter of personal conviction, the man having his father's wife, would Paul have mentioned it?

Paul and the church knew that the Law spoke of actions that displeased God, things that people in other nations such as Egypt and Canaan did. (Lev. 18:3) Paul doesn't say this issue in Corinth is one of those: He says its worse than something that those nations would tolerate. The Law actually did prescribe a penalty against this particular sin, porneia. (Lev. 18:8)

Speaking of the church at Corinth, Paul adds, “And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.” (1 Cor. 5:2) He says the motive of complacency, the church not actively removing sin from its midst, was kin to arrogance. Instead of being proud, Paul implies, they should be mourning because nothing has been done to save the brother. This needed cleansing of the old leaven would have the double effect of (1) working toward the brother's repentance and (2) cleansing the lump, the church, from stain. (1 Cor. 5:7) In order to rescue the erring brother, Paul had to first convict the erring brother of his sin.

Paul clarifies the situation for the future: “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one.” (1 Cor. 5:11) One might say, “Well, Paul didn't include murderers in the list, so they should be okay!” But didn't the Law also convict murderers? How could the church tell if someone were indeed “guilty” without judging?

The same Bible that tells Christians not to judge one another for matters of personal conviction also tells us not to allow sin a foothold in the kingdom. For this, we must be open, at times, to examining ourselves and also submitting ourselves to one another for scrutiny in order that Satan does not add our souls to his menagerie of sorrows.