

Sunday, June 5, 2016—I Corinthians 5:1—Straight Talk About Fornication

Introduction/Review

- Two weeks ago, before the holiday weekend we finished our study of chapter 4 by looking at the subject of correction during the dispensation of grace.
- This morning we want to begin studying chapter 5. In chapter 5 Paul begins to address some specific forms or types of immorality that were taking place in Corinth. As we will see, this discussion of immorality also spills over into chapter 6.

I Corinthians 5:1

- **It is reported commonly *that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.***
- I Corinthians 4:21—after concluding chapter 4 by asking the Corinthians how they would like Paul to come unto them; “with a rod” or “in love?” Paul rolls up his sleeves and begins to tackle a few issues head on in chapter 5. The first issue that Paul is going to deal with is the issue of sexual immorality.
- *It is reported commonly* that there is *fornication among you*—what one conclude from this opening phrase but that it was common knowledge throughout that ancient world that there was fornication among the saints at Corinth.
- I Corinthians 1:11—Paul’s knowledge of their fornication appears to have been known by him via common knowledge not necessary specific reports. There appears to be a difference between how Paul learned about their man following factions and their excessive sexual immorality.
- *Fornication*—according to Noah Webster (1828) the English word “fornication” carries the following meanings:
 - The incontinence or lewdness of unmarried persons, male or female; also, the criminal conversation of a married man with an unmarried woman.
 - Adultery. (Matt. 5:32)
 - Incest. (I Cor. 5:1)
 - Idolatry; a forsaking of the true God, and worshipping of idols. (II Chro. 21:11, Rev. 19:2)
- As the English definitions suggest, in the Bible, “fornication” deals with a variety of sexual sins of the flesh.

- Matthew 5:32, 19:9—during his earthly ministry Christ said that “fornication” was the only acceptable grounds for divorce. Therefore, in this case “fornication” would equal “adultery.”
- Romans 1:28-29—“fornication” is the first by product of a reprobate mind, according to these verses.
- I Corinthians 7:2—in this context “fornication” is avoided via marriage. Therefore, Paul is talking about pre-marital or sex outside of marriage.
- Galatians 5:19—“fornication” is identified as a work of the flesh and is distinguished from “adultery.”
- Ephesians 5:3—“fornication” is conduct unbecoming of a saint.
- Colossians 3:5—“fornication” is one of the sins of the flesh that Paul instructs the Colossians to “mortify” i.e., put to death.
- I Thessalonians 4:3—the expressly stated will of God is for believers is to abstain from “fornication.”
- I Corinthians 5:1—it was “reported commonly” that there was fornication among the Corinthians. The implication is that the Corinthians were involved in all manner of sexual immorality.
- *and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles*—this phrase lets you know that Paul was not simply referring to the temple prostitution that was rampant in Corinth. Rather the Corinthians were involved in something that even the Gentiles looked at with disgust and disdain.
- *that one should have his father's wife*—identifies that nature of the fornication i.e., incest. Many have complained that phraseology is not clear. What does the phrase “father’s wife” mean?
 - Stepmother
 - Or
 - Paternal mother
- On the surface, in common usage the phrase “father’s wife” would seem to denote one’s stepmother i.e., the woman who is married to one’s father but is not their biological mother. Is there room for ambiguity here?

- First, the nature of this “fornication” is such that it is not even named among the gentiles. It hardly seems likely that sex with one’s stepmother (not a blood relative) would have been so abhorrent to the gentiles that it would not have even been named among them.
- Second, the language surrounding this incident is particularly heinous and one that even the pagan Gentiles would not speak of.
 - Verse 2—the Corinthians should be in mourning over this action.
 - Verse 2—the man should have been take away from among them.
 - Verse 5—the man needs to be delivered unto Satan for the destruction of his flesh.
 - Verse 13—the man needs to be put out from among their midst.
- Third, given the connection between “fornication” and “adultery” perhaps the language “his father’s wife” is supposed to emphasize the wickedness of not merely taking unto himself another’s wife i.e., “adultery” but his own “father’s wife” i.e., incest.
- Fourth, the same phraseology “father’s wife” is used in the Law to describe incest.
 - Leviticus 20:11
 - Deuteronomy 22:30
 - Deuteronomy 27:20
- I Corinthians 5:1—given all these factors it seems reasonable to view the nature of the “fornication” that Paul is addressing here to be sex with one’s own biological mother. Even in our modern culture this is one of the only forms of sexual activity that would truly be viewed as depraved and wrong.
- Regardless of whether or not one views this as the guys “mother” or “stepmother” the Corinthians need to be glad that they were living during the dispensation of grace. For surely if they were living under the law there would have been physical chastisement that followed their conduct in this matter.
- I Corinthians 3:1-3—the episode in chapter 5 puts the carnality of the Corinthians on full display.