

# Spiritual Maturity and Purity in the Body of Christ

<b>Key Text:</b>	1 Corinthians 3-5
<b>Key Verse(s):</b>	“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” (1 Corinthians 5:6-7)

## Background to the Study

Corinth's prime location made it a melting pot of different religions and cults. Paul saw this diversity as a huge opportunity to share the Gospel. After planting the church there, he later reminded believers of their freedom from sinful customs and urged them to live out the Gospel fully.

In chapters 3 and 4, Paul calls the church to drop petty divisions. Some preferred his simple style of preaching, others liked a more philosophical approach. Disagreements also arose over whether Christian freedom meant abandoning Jewish food laws or keeping them strictly. The culture around them had begun shaping the church instead of the other way around. Using the image of a building, Paul explained that every believer's unique strengths and gifts were needed to build up the Gospel message. The Corinthians also saw opportunities for debate as a means to test and stretch the intellect. Paul warned them against pride in human wisdom by telling them in verse 19 of chapter 3, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.” Paul realized the danger of becoming vain and full of self. In light of Paul's teaching of “dying daily,” the Corinthian believers needed to be careful about exalting each other or themselves in their own wisdom.

Chapter 5 shifts focus: the church had left idolatry behind, but Paul stressed that the Gospel cannot coexist with sin. Moral compromise had crept in—so much so that a case of incest, shocking even to non-believers, was being ignored. Paul was very aware of the sensual and licentious practices prevalent at Corinth, but he also knew that the Gospel dealt completely with sin. He knew that Christianity centred in the Cross and that Christ died to make men holy. Thus, he regarded any situation that allowed sin, or opposed a life of holiness, as a perversion of the Gospel. Paul's concern was not just the sin itself but the church's failure to act. In verses 3–5, he lays out how the Early Church disciplined offenders: out of concern for the individual's soul, but also to protect the body from corruption. Paul challenged the congregation to “purge out therefore the old leaven,” referring to the commandment for a Jewish family to get rid of all leaven in preparation for the Passover. In the interest of maintaining purity, Paul commanded the believers “not to keep company” with the offender. The phrase translated here means, “to mingle together with,” and implies a close, habitual relationship.

# Testimony from Our Day

A few years back, I worked at the head office of a big bank. All our customers' transactions were stored on a huge central computer. Every so often, because of storage limits, we had to clear out old records—a "system purge." If we didn't, the system would slow down, risk corrupting data, or even crash completely.

Paul used a similar idea with the church in Corinth. He told them to "purge" pride, favouritism, and immorality from their lives and fellowship—just like the Israelites had to remove every trace of yeast (symbolic of sin) from their homes before Passover. A careful search was made for any speck of leaven that had escaped scrutiny.

In the same way, we're called to keep our lives, homes, and churches clear of anything that pollutes us spiritually. Jesus, our Passover Lamb, has already paid for our freedom from sin with His own life. How could we then tolerate in our lives any of those elements for which our Saviour paid such a tremendous price?

Christ didn't save us so we could limp along in the same old struggles—He saved us to live holy, transformed lives. So, let's celebrate that freedom with sincerity and truth, just as Paul instructed the Corinthian church. Don't risk a "spiritual system crash." Keep sin out.

# A Closer Look

Question 1	At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul refers to the Corinthian believers as “babes” in their spiritual lives. How would you define a “babe” in Christ? How does a “babe” differ from one who is spiritually mature? (b) Paul said he could not address some of those who attended the church in Corinth as spiritual people because they were still carnal. How was their carnality manifested? (1 Corinthians 3:3-4)
Question 2	Why do you think the Corinthian church split into groups, with some backing certain leaders over others? (b) How did Paul say the church should view its leaders, and how could that shape the way we see leaders in the church today?
Question 3	In 1 Corinthians 3:23, Paul says that believers “are Christ’s.” What does that imply regarding our actions and attitudes as they relate to the maturing process?
Question 4	According to 1 Corinthians 4:12-13, Paul and the other Apostles had suffered deeply at the hands of some individuals. Identify three forms of negative treatment that they had received. How did the Apostles choose to react? What can this teach us about how to deal with those who oppose us?
Question 5	Who did Paul say shouldn’t be part of close Christian fellowship, and why? (b) In Paul’s eyes, which was the bigger issue in the Corinthian church – the immorality or the pride behind it? Explain your view.
Question 6	Leaven was symbolic of sin, and Paul wrote that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Why should a church be diligent in dealing with sin? (1 Corinthians 5:6-7) What are some practical ways we can keep the sinful values and practices of our culture from creeping into our lives and our church?

## Take Home

In a world where nothing feels certain, there’s one unshakable foundation we can build our lives on – Jesus Christ. When we plant our faith firmly in Him, we find a freedom and safety that nothing else can offer. He gave His life so we could be set free from sin. The question is – have you personally experienced His forgiveness and the fresh start He offers?