Digging Deeper: The Greater Meaning of 1 Corinthians 5:13

Monday, September 28, 2026

In 1 Corinthians 5:13, the apostle Paul closes his firm counsel about an unrepentant immoral man in the Corinthian congregation with a command drawn from Jehovah's Law to Israel:

> *"Remove the wicked person from among yourselves."*
>
> (New World Translation)

The day's text explains that such removal takes place when a wrongdoer does not respond to repeated efforts by the elders to lead him to repentance. The announcement that follows is not meant to humiliate him. It informs the congregation so that they can "stop keeping company" with that person, "not even eating

with" him. (1 Corinthians 5:9-11) To dig out the gems in this verse, we will look at Paul's Greek wording, at the Deuteronomy quotation behind it, and at the leaven illustration that shows why this direction protects Jehovah's people.

1 "Remove" — A Decisive Lifting Out (*exairō*)

Paul's command uses the Greek verb ἐξαίρω (*exairō*, Strong's G1808), "to lift up" or "to take away out of a place." The form ἐξάρατε (*exarate*) is an aorist imperative, calling for a clear, decisive act rather than a drawn-out process. Thayer's lexicon defines it as lifting someone up or taking him away "out of a place; to remove," and notes that Paul applies it here to removing a person "from a company."

The NWT Study Bible note on 1 Corinthians 5:13 explains that Paul is quoting Jehovah's law to Israel: "Remove what is

bad from your midst." (Deuteronomy 17:7) That quote is apparently taken from the Septuagint, which reads "the wicked (*evil*) person" instead of "what is bad." Similar wording appears at Deuteronomy 19:19; 22:21, 24; and 24:7. In Hebrew, Deuteronomy 17:7 uses the verb בָּעַר (*ba'ar*, Strong's H1197), often meaning to burn or consume, and in this legal formula, "to purge" or "clear away" what is bad. Under the Mosaic Law that purge could involve capital punishment. In the Christian congregation, the parallel action is spiritual: the unrepentant wrongdoer is removed from the fellowship of Jehovah's people.

Paul had already described the same step earlier in the chapter: "you must hand such a man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 5:5) The NWT Study Bible note clarifies that handing him over to

Satan meant removing him from the congregation into the world over which Satan is the god and ruler. (1 John 5:19) The goal was twofold: to remove the corrupting element and to preserve the congregation's positive spirit, or dominant attitude.

- Removal follows repeated attempts to lead the person to repentance; it is not a first response. (2 Kings 17:12-15; compare Deuteronomy 30:19, 20)
- The announcement simply informs the congregation that he is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses, so that Scriptural direction can be applied.

2 "Stop Keeping Company" — No Mixing Together (*synanamignymi*)

Once the wicked person has been removed, the congregation must also change how they treat him. Paul wrote:

“stop keeping company with anyone called a brother who is sexually immoral or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man.” (1 Corinthians 5:11)

The Greek verb is συναναμίγνυμαι (*synanamignymi*, Strong’s G4874). The NWT Study Bible note explains that it means “to mix up together.” Keeping company, then, would imply close fellowship or companionship and sharing views and sentiments. The same verb appears at 2 Thessalonians 3:14, where Paul says of a disorderly brother: “do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed.” Christians were not told to cut off all contact with immoral people in the world—otherwise, as Paul noted, “you would actually have to get out of the world.” (1 Corinthians 5:10) The restriction applies to one “called a brother” who persists in serious wrongdoing.

“Not even eating with such a man” sharpens the point. In Bible times, eating together was often a sign of friendship and opened the door to further association. Jewish Christians understood this well, since Jews did not keep company with or eat with people of the nations. (Acts 10:28; 11:2, 3) Refusing ordinary social meals with an unrepentant wrongdoer protects the congregation and may move the person to feel the loss of spiritual fellowship.

- The announcement exists so that the congregation can follow this Scriptural admonition consistently.
- Limiting association is an act of loyalty to Jehovah’s standards, not personal hostility. (2 John 10, 11)

3 “A Little Leaven” — Why Removal Protects Everyone (*zymē*)

Paul gives the reason for such firmness: “Do you not know that a little leaven ferments the whole batch of dough?” (1 Corinthians 5:6) The Greek noun ζύμη (*zymē*, Strong’s G2219) means leaven, or yeast. In the ancient kitchen, a small piece of fermented dough from a previous baking was kneaded into a fresh batch; soon the whole lump rose. The NWT Study Bible note on this verse observes that in the Bible, leaven is often used as a symbol of sin and corruption, and that the related verb ζυμόω (*zymoō*) means “to leaven,” that is, to spread through or affect. Paul uses the same proverb at Galatians 5:9.

He then draws on the Festival of Unleavened Bread: “Clear away the old leaven so that you may be a new batch,

inasmuch as you are free from ferment. For, indeed, Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7) Just as Israelite families searched their houses to remove every trace of leaven, Christian elders must act to get "the old leaven" out of the congregation. A corrupt person left in place could influence the whole group and make it unclean in Jehovah's eyes.

That matches the day's comment: "Unrepentant wrongdoers can weaken the determination of those who are trying to live by Jehovah's righteous standards." Paul later wrote the same principle another way: "Do not be misled. Bad associations spoil useful habits." (1 Corinthians 15:33) The Greek verb φθείρω (*phtheirō*, Strong's G5351) means to corrupt, spoil, or ruin. The proverb Paul cites—φθείρουσιν ἤθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλίαι κακαί—warns that bad companionships (*homiliai*, Strong's G3657) corrupt useful moral habits. Proverbs 13:20 says the

same from the Hebrew side: “The one walking with the wise will become wise, But the one who has dealings with the stupid will fare badly.”

- A little tolerated wrongdoing does not stay little; like leaven, it spreads.
- Removing the unrepentant person protects those who are striving to remain clean, and it may yet move the wrongdoer toward repentance and restoration. (2 Corinthians 2:6-8)

Key Spiritual Reflections on Congregation Cleanliness

- **See Jehovah’s Standard, Not Human Sentiment:** When an announcement is made, do I remember that the purpose is to help the congregation “stop keeping company” with an unrepentant wrongdoer, not to humiliate him? (1 Corinthians 5:11, 13)

- **Guard the Batch:** Do I take seriously Paul's warning that "a little leaven ferments the whole batch of dough," so that I avoid close association that could weaken my determination to live by Jehovah's standards? (1 Corinthians 5:6; 15:33)
- **Choose Companions Wisely:** Am I "walking with the wise," or am I allowing associations—inside or outside the congregation—that spoil useful habits? (Proverbs 13:20)
- **Hope for Restoration:** Do I keep in mind that the aim of discipline includes the wrongdoer's possible recovery, just as the man in Corinth was later to be forgiven and comforted when he repented? (2 Corinthians 2:6-8)