

## **Leadership and Morality in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13: Lessons for Contemporary Ghanaian Church Polity**

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### **Abstract**

Paul's response to the issue of sexual immorality in the Corinthian community has attracted the attention of several biblical scholars. While some think that the judgment of Paul on the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 concerns the identity of the Christian community and moral responsibility, others argue that the focus is on the church's response to immorality. The present study, on the other hand, through a literary critical analysis of the text, with close attention to its semantics and allusions, and an assessment of the material in the light of its social and historical background, establishes that the absence of a 'functional leadership' in the Corinthian church in the absence of its founder, Paul, to provide an authoritative guide to members exacerbated their moral decadence. The paper concludes that contemporary Ghanaian church polity can learn participatory and shared leadership, which will foster group cohesion, promote the unity of purpose, and heal discord within Church communities.

**Keywords:** Church polity, Corinthians, Ghanaian, Incestuous, Leadership, Morality.

### **Introduction**

Paul's response to sexual immorality in the Corinthian community has attracted the attention of many biblical interpreters.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, some interpreters of 1 Cor 5:1-13 have

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. George Ossom-Batsa, "Responsible Community Behaviour or Exclusion: Interpreting 1 Cor 5:1-13 from a Communicative Perspective," *Neotestamentica* 45, no. 2(2011): 293-310

focused on Paul's judgment on the incestuous man to highlight the Christian community's identity and its responsibility in moral decisions.<sup>2</sup> However, the community's leadership type and practice do not feature prominently in discussions of immorality in the Corinthian Church, even though several social scientists have sufficiently indicated that ineffective leadership often results in deviant behaviour in a society.<sup>3</sup> This paper argues that weak leadership in the Corinthian community might have exacerbated their moral decadence.<sup>4</sup> It interprets 1 Cor 5:1-13 to establish that weak leadership in the Corinthian Church inflamed their moral misconduct.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it explores lessons from the analysis for contemporary Ghanaian church polity.

The paper is organised into three sections. Firstly, it examines the Socio-Cultural context of the Corinthian church; secondly, it reads the selected text through a literary critical analysis. Lastly, it explores the issues that emanate from an engagement of the text with contemporary Ghanaian Church reality.

### **Socio-Cultural Background of Roman Corinth**

Corinth, an ancient Greek city, was very prosperous because of its position and nature as the Roman administrative capital.<sup>6</sup> It was a great and flourishing city in the old Mediterranean area, with a robust linguistic and cultural populace of different races, mainly Roman veterans, tradesmen, and daily labourers, Jews (Acts 18:2,

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 194-95.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Andrews D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Cambridge University: Unpublished Thesis, 1991). See also Andrews D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Leadership* (T & T Clarke, London 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Charles, "The Report of 1 Corinthians 5 in Critical Dialogue with Foucault," *JCRT* 11, no.1 (2010): 142- 158. Mark A. Matson, "Sexual Sin as a Demonstration of Disunity: 1 Corinthians 5 in Context," *Leaven* 9, no. 3 (2001): 1-7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Michael Berram, "Fools for the Sake of Christ: Missional Hermeneutics and Praxis in the Corinthian Correspondence." *Missiology* 43, no.2 (2015): 195-207; see also T. J. Lang, "Trouble with Insiders: The Social Profile of *apistoi* in Paul's Corinthian Correspondence," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 4 (2018): 981-1001.

<sup>6</sup> George Ossom-Batsa, "Responsible Community Behavior," 294.

7; 1 Cor 1:14; 16:17), some with Latin names (Rom 16:22-23), and Greeks.<sup>7</sup> Berchie affirms that the city of Corinth was made up of people from different strata of society: retired soldiers, freed men from Rome, and some Greeks.<sup>8</sup>

Although the majority of the inhabitants were Greeks, the culture was Roman.<sup>9</sup> According to Martin W. Eldred, “it was intentionally Romanised in the sense of language, politics, and look, resembling more a city from southern Italy, such as Pompeii, than a similar city in Greece.”<sup>10</sup>

Geographically, Corinth was a strategic asset for the Empire and ideal for political, military, and economic benefit.<sup>11</sup> Being a port city, it enjoyed many commercial activities. It also served as sentry of the Isthmus that bridged the Peloponnese and the mainland and separated the Saronic and Corinthian gulfs.<sup>12</sup> Because of two harbours at Cenchræe and Lechaëum, it was an important transit point for vessels traversing from the southern peninsular to central Greece for trade purposes. Furthermore, Corinth was famous for the production of bronze and terracotta and the shipping and mercantile economies.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, Corinth was a flourishing economy and a pluralistic religious society, which permitted different religious ideologies to co-exist. Scholars argue that the conflicts and concerns

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<sup>7</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Berchie, “The Meaning of *Harpax* in 1 Cor 5:10: An Exegetical Study,” *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 2, no. 2 (2012): 2.

<sup>9</sup> Sean M. McDonough, “Competent to Judge: The Old Testament Connection between 1 Corinthians 5 and 6,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 56, no.1 (2005): 47.

<sup>10</sup> Martin W. Eldred, “New Creation, Corinth and the ‘New Face’ of Community in Christ: Paul’s ‘Evangelical Apologia’ in 2 Corinthians 1-7,” *The Graduate Theological Foundation: Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation* (2016), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Eldred, “New Creation,” 26.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 2-5; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> According to Jacobson and Weitzman, Bronze “was a highly valued alloy of copper, gold, and silver, of which the manufacture existed in both Grecian and Roman periods.” See D. M. Jacobson and M. P. Weitzman, “What Was Corinthian Bronze?” *American Journal of Archaeology* 96, no. 2 (1992): 237-247.

in the Church emanated from clashes over three ideologies: philosophical, religious, and political.<sup>14</sup>

These people who populated the city came with their laws, culture and religion which was fused with that of Corinth which was historically Greek because it was Hellenised. Paul thus, described the diversity of the church: Jews, Greeks, Slaves and free, affirming the view by Fee that “the church was in many ways a mirror of the city.” As largely former pagans, they brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behaviour which clashed with that of the few Jews. In spite of the fact that they were within the Christian community in Corinth, there existed in them an inordinate element of Corinth culture which resulted in behaviours and attitudes that needed to be eradicated. According to Philip, mixed reactions from the cultural conflicts concerning language, work, and acceptable behaviour befitting believers persisted.<sup>15</sup> Though converts were largely Gentiles, there were some ‘God fearers among them.’<sup>16</sup> This prevailing atmosphere at Corinth favoured the acceptance of varying religious ideas, even among Paul’s converts to the Christian faith.

Moreover, indications in the letter suggest that social factors played a part in creating the problems Paul addressed in the correspondence. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:26 shows that many converts came from the lower class, with few from the upper class. Several other references within the correspondence also allow for the conclusion that some members of the congregation were wealthy and powerful socially.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, Fitzmyer concludes that the letter aimed at bringing order and unity into the community, about

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<sup>14</sup> The diverse nature of the community allowed people from different philosophical ideologies and backgrounds which they imported into the invariably impacted their way of life. Again, Corinth was a religiously pluralistic, so the members who joined the had religious ideologies from their previous religious groups which could have influenced their beliefs and way of life in the Christian community of Corinth.

<sup>15</sup> Mario Phillip, “Delivery into the Hands of Satan—A Church in Apostasy and not Knowing It: An Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:5,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39, no.1 (2015): 47.

<sup>16</sup> David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideologies from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1996), 91.

<sup>17</sup> Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 95.

which Paul had received written and verbal reports.<sup>18</sup> Against this background, the paper analyses 1 Cor 5:1-13 to establish the social ethics of Paul and the implicit leadership issues in the community that influenced the moral behaviour of the Corinthian church.

### Literary Critical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

In the first four chapters of the letter (cf. 1 Cor 1:1- 4: 21), Paul focuses on divisions in the community with the words *σχίσματα* ‘division’, and *σχίζω* ‘to divide.’ Though these words are used rarely in Scripture, they denote either the act of being physically torn (cf. Matt 9:16; Mark 2:21) or divided due to conflicting aims or ideals (cf. John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19; 1 Cor 11:18; 12:25). In 1 Corinthians, however, Paul stresses how sexual immorality has become prevalent in this divided community.

With the repeated use of the noun *καύχημα* ‘boasting’ (1 Cor 5:6), and the corresponding verb *καυχάομαι* ‘a sense of self-glorifying boast, pride oneself on’ (1 Cor 1:29,31; 3:21; 4:7), and the several repetitions of *φυσιώω* (1 Cor 4: 6, 18, 19; 5:2), he links the first five chapters. However, in chapters 5-6, the word *πορνεία* and its derivatives occur many times (1 Cor 5:1, 9, 10, 11; 6:9, 13, 15, 16, and 18), and this emphasises the unitary thrust of the pericope in dealing with matters pertinent to Christian morality.<sup>19</sup>

Malcolm supports this view when he indicates that the rhetorical unit opens with ethical application topics and placements and is informed by the *kerygmatic* renegotiation of ethical conventions.<sup>20</sup> Placing 1 Cor 5:1-13 between two pericopes that address moral concerns towards the gospel and its messengers’ challenges readers to reflect on their corporate responsibility. Furthermore, the

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 52.

<sup>19</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Function of ‘Excommunication’ in Paul,” *Harvard Theological Review* 73, no.1 (1980): 251-252.

<sup>20</sup> Mathew R. Malcolm, “Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians: The Impact of Paul’s Gospel on His Macro-Rhetoric,” in *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 155*, ed. Paul Trebilco (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xiv.

incestuous relationship described in the pericope under study is prohibited in Israel (cf. Lev 18:8; 20:11; cf. Gen 35:22; 49:4; Ezek 22:10-11), and also denounced by the Mishnah.<sup>21</sup>

Paul introduces the rhetorical unit with the adverb Ὁλως in 1 Cor 5:1 (cf. 6:7; 15:29). While he addresses the disobedience and arrogance of some members in the Church in 4: 14-21, he stresses a specific case of incest in 5:1-13 with displeasure. The parallel phrases ἐν ὑμῖν πορνεία in 5:1 and τὸνπονη ρὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν in 5:13 forms an *inclusio*, creating a literary unit. Literary features in the passage provide indications for dividing it for the analysis. For example, in vv. 1-2, Paul narrates the report of sexual immorality he had received, the congregation's attitude towards it, and the removal of the culprit from the assembly; in vv. 3-11, he supports his stance with a series of arguments (vv. 3-5, the ostracization of the offender so that his spirit may be saved 'in the day of the Lord;' vv. 6-8, the spiritual benefit for excluding the offender from the community; vv. 9-11, clarifications on how the community should relate to offenders, insiders, and outsiders must be excluded). Finally, in vv. 12-13, he reiterated his position, requesting the community to exclude the offender from their midst; but he quickly noted that only God was to judge similar offenders outside the *ecclesia*. In the light of the above, this paper proposes the following division for the pericope:

- vv. 1-2      Rebuke of the community
- vv. 3-5      Appeal to divine authority
- vv. 6-8      Spiritual benefit of expulsion
- vv. 9-11     Removal of offender
- vv. 12-13   The responsibility of the community

This organisation will guide the interpretation and theological reflection in the subsequent sections.

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<sup>21</sup> Philip, "Delivery into Satan," 47.

### **Rebuke of the Community (vv. 1-2)**

The epistle addresses various problems in the Christian community, including sexual immorality, and it is therefore pastoral. To emphasise the gravity of immorality, Paul opens the discussion with the adverb *holōs* ‘actually,’ which expresses certainty of the report<sup>22</sup> and suggests an awareness of an unpleasant situation. The clause Ὁλως ἀκούεται ἐν ὑμῖν πορνεία in v. 1 could refer to an earlier letter in which Paul warned the believers in Corinth not to associate with immoral people (cf. v.9). The type of immorality concerns a person involved with his stepmother (vs. 1). The Pentateuch strongly prohibits such marital unions and YHWH repeatedly warned the Israelites against it (cf. Lev 18:8; 20:11; Deut 22:30; 27:20).<sup>23</sup> The punishment associated with an incestuous or adulterous affair was often a curse or even death (Deut 27:20; 22:22, 24, 30).<sup>24</sup> However, as it was the tradition of Israel to deal with people who commit grievous sins by removing them from the community (Deut. 17:2-7), Paul, according to Sean McDonough, reflected on this injunction when he prescribed the punishment for the incestuous man.<sup>25</sup> The connection between Deuteronomy 17:7 and 1 Corinthians 5:13 underscores why Paul could not comprehend the tolerance of the Christian community of that evil behaviour. Therefore, as a Jew and Pharisee, Paul criticised and rebuked the Church for entertaining such wrong doing. He did this by employing the implicit command, ἀρθῆ (v. 2c), with God understood as the subject.

### **Appeal to Divine Authority (vv. 3-5)**

In vv. 3-5, Paul indicated the facts and the actions he would have taken if he were physically present in the Church. Consequently, he instructed them to act when they met. Taylor identifies four directives to take decisive action against the outrageous sin within

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<sup>22</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, “Deliver this Man to Satan” (1 Cor 5:5): A Case Study in Church Discipline, *The Masters Seminary Journal* 3, no.1 (Spring 1992):35.

<sup>23</sup> Kistemaker, “Deliver this Man to Satan,” 35.

<sup>24</sup> Philip, “Delivery into Satan,” 47.

<sup>25</sup> Sean M. McDonough, “Competent to Judge: The Old Testament Connection between 1 Corinthians 5 and 6,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 56, no. 1 (2005): 101.

the faith community (1 Cor 5:2,5,7,13).<sup>26</sup> The use of the perfect κέκρικα in verse 3 suggests that though he was not there in body, he had passed a judgment to be effected at their meeting. However, scholarly views vary on what precisely is meant by “delivering someone to Satan for destruction.” Some interpreters believe it refers to a degenerative physical illness or bodily suffering that will befall the offender.<sup>27</sup> Others think that the command signals the destruction of the offender’s sinful nature.<sup>28</sup> Fee, on the other hand, sees the destruction of the flesh as referring to life outside Christ and the spirit referring to the life oriented towards God.<sup>29</sup> For Philip, deliverance to Satan signifies a relinquishing of divine restraint upon the offender so that he might experience the enormity of persisting in sinful practices, thereby finding himself at the mercies of Satan.<sup>30</sup> The hope was that he would later recognise his absolute helplessness and return to Christ. In agreeing with Fitzmyer, ‘delivering someone to Satan for destruction’ as used here by Paul should be understood in a figurative and eschatological sense, implying that by severing fellowship with the community, the individual will experience temporal torment resulting from the exclusion from the new people of God.<sup>31</sup> Though the debate is ongoing, whatever approach one takes in administering discipline, the person’s salvation should always be ensured by carrying it out within a spiritual context, in order that salvation of the individual will be ensured.

### **Spiritual Benefit of Expulsion (vv. 6-8)**

Paul’s denouncement of the unrepentant sinner was based on the spiritual benefit for the Church. This view is, for example, held

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Taylor, 1 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scriptures, *The New American Commentary* 28, (Nashville, TN: B&H,2014), 131.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 239.

<sup>28</sup> Philip, “Delivery into Satan,” 46.

<sup>29</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212-213.

<sup>30</sup> Philip, “Delivery into Satan,” 50.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 239.



by Kimble.<sup>32</sup> Paul grounds his appeal on the fact that Christ, the Passover lamb, has already been sacrificed (5:7), and thus they should “celebrate the festival” in the appropriate way (5:8). His rhetorical question in v. 6b where he used the metaphor of little leaven to reprimand the community stresses this fact. It signals a distinction between what is and what ought to be, between what the Christians of Corinth know and do. With this clause, Paul contrasts between the spiritual status of the Church before the action of the incestuous man, which he exhorted them to maintain, with that of when his action was condoned by the faith community. He indicates this contrast with the metaphors μικρὰ ζύμη and ὄλον φύραμα asserting the impact the action was having on the identity of the Church.

For this reason, he starts v. 7 with an imperative aorist ἐκκαθάρατε indicating an explicit command they were to carry out among them. It was in a similar relation to the call to responsibility by the Church in v. 5 where the infinitive was used. Paul explicitly underscores his dislike for the inaction of the faith community with the sharp command not to perpetuate those occurrences in the Church because of the spiritual implications of their action.

### **Removal of the Offender (vv. 9-11)**

In the midst of the issues concerning the sin of the offender, the corporate responsibility of the Church, as well as the arrogance exhibited by the members, Paul’s ultimate concern was the purity of the Church which he earlier described as the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor 3:16-17). To achieve the purpose set out in vv. 6-8, Paul facilitates the removal of the offender by employing a narrative that combines metaphors<sup>33</sup> and questions in vv. 9-11 to instruct the community on the expected way of life. The verb Ἐξάρατε in verse 13 occurs only here in the

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<sup>32</sup> Jeremy M. Kimble, “Exclusion from the People of God: An Examination of Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians 5,” Paper Presented at the Southeast regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Wake Forest, NC (2012), 6.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on Paul’s use of metaphors, see Charles A. Wanamaker, “Metaphor and Morality: Examples of Paul’s Moral Thinking in 1 Corinthians 1-5,” *Neotestamentica* 39, no. 2 (2005): 409-433.

New Testament. Its object τὸν πονηρὸν also appears only here in 1 Corinthians. The prepositional phrase ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν introduces Paul's rhetorical strategy as he emphatically quotes the scriptural command without any further argument. He, thus, utilises its optimal authoritative impact for reinforcing the main thrust of 5:1–13 on his earlier judgment on the incestuous man.<sup>34</sup> Thieselton maintains that the preposition *ex* that prefixes the verb *exarate* and the *ex* that introduces the prepositional phrase, “from out of your very midst,” intensify the separation commanded as an absolute necessity. It reinforces the perlocutionary strength of the statement and intensifies the injunction. The audience must drive the offender from out of and away from the midst of themselves. Again, the addition of the reflexive pronoun αὐτῶν to ὑμῶν underscores the responsibility for the urgent expulsion of the evil one by the members of the community.<sup>35</sup>

### The Responsibility of the Community (12-13)

These concluding verses of the chapter emphasize Paul's appeal to the community to assume responsibility for removing the offender. Heil maintains that beginning a sentence with the second-person plural aorist imperative verb *exarate* in v. 13b commands the audience as a group or community “to remove, get rid of, expel, or drive out” the evil one (τὸν πονηρὸν). Hence, both the leaders and the entire community are responsible for ensuring the appropriate spiritual status of the Church by driving out the evil person. Again, the aorist imperative *exarate* as well as the indefinite designation, “the evil one,” allow for a reference both to a specific individual in the given context and to any such evil person as a general principle.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, ἐξάρατε τὸν πονηρὸν ὑμῶν αὐτῶν, is a transparent citation of the LXX of Deut. 17:7 (ἀξαρβίς τον πονηρον ἀξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν). It climaxes with the question of removing ‘abominations’

<sup>34</sup> John Paul Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 15* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Lit, 2005) 91.

<sup>35</sup> Thieselton, *Corinthians*, 417.

<sup>36</sup> Heil, *Rhetorical Role*, 92.

(Deut. 17:1, 5) from Israel, which is parallel to Paul's discussion of removing from the Church the man having sexual relations with his stepmother. Thus, as it was Israel's responsibility to ensure moral purity and avoid abominations, Paul entrusted the Church in Corinth with similar responsibility of removing the man with the abominable behaviour.

To conclude, Paul employs the brusquely authoritative scriptural directive in v. 13b to impress upon his Corinthian audience a very urgent and unconditional obligation to drive out the offender from their midst. He used key metaphors and expressions that have the function of implicit command and appeal in asserting the responsibility of the community towards the maintenance of the spiritual status of the Church. By appealing to authoritative support from God and the Holy Spirit, he indicates this act's spiritual benefits for the Church. The ensuing section offers a theological synthesis of the analysis by examining leadership in the Corinthian community to investigate how that contributed to the moral state of the Church.

### Theological Synthesis

There are different views on what accounted for the *laissez-faire* attitude of the Corinthian community towards the immoralities that were of concern to Paul including the actions of the incestuous man. From the discourse between Paul and the community, it can be observed that the failure on the part of the leaders to exercise effective leadership in the community was the cause.

The written or oral reports from some members to Paul (1 Cor 5:1) suggest their displeasure with events in the community.<sup>37</sup> Divisions in the Church (1: 10; 3:1-4) undermined the authority of the community leaders to a large extent, such that they had to settle disputes among themselves at the law courts under unbelievers (6:1-

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<sup>37</sup> The verb *akouetai* in 5:1 suggests Paul heard about the immoral act from a source. It is however, not specified as to whether it was reported to him by those sent to him from the community mentioned in 1:11, 16:17, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus; or may be by those who presented the letter he talks about in 7:1.

4).<sup>38</sup> Plummer and Robertson rightly observe that the heterogeneous nature of the Corinthian community weakened the authority of the Christian leaders.<sup>39</sup> Converts aligned themselves with one leader or the other, thereby promoting disunity. Converts would say, “I am for Paul, I am for Apollos or I am for Cephas...” (cf. 1 Cor 1:12-13).

Commenting on the attitude of the Corinthian community, Murphy-O’connor noted:

It was a concrete manifestation of their superiority with respect to all who were still in bondage to attitudes and conventions from which they had been freed. They were possessed of a ‘wisdom’ (2:6) and a ‘knowledge’ (8:1) which transformed them into *pneumatikoi* (2:15), *teleioi* (2:6) and *sophoi* (3:18), and which permitted them to act as they pleased (6:12; 10:23). This overweening confidence in their own rightness was born of the sense of difference from others, which was rooted in the fact that they had been baptised in the name of Jesus (cf. 1:13).<sup>40</sup>

The misinterpretation of their new state of freedom in Christ led some converts to pride, which ultimately resulted in arrogance and acceptance of deviant behaviour from their faith as normal. To some extent, the Church’s problem and the reaction to the offender could be attributed to the lack of effective or functional leadership in the Church. Because of the divisive nature of the community, the leaders lacked full authority to exercise discipline in the Church. This expression in 5:4 gives the impression that the Church leaned largely on Paul as their founder in taking crucial decisions. Therefore, when the issue happened, they could not take any action but report to him. Moreover, Paul’s oversight authority on the Church from outside was not cogent enough to enhance the

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<sup>38</sup> cf. 1 Cor 1-4; see also Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*.

<sup>39</sup> Alfred Plummer and Archibald Robertson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians*, xv.

<sup>40</sup> Jerome Murphy-O’connor, *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting the Major Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

unity of the Church and ensure careful observance of his teachings. Hence, the toleration of deviant behaviour in the community.

### **Lessons for Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity**

Reading 1 Cor 5:1-13 from a Ghanaian perspective immediately recalls the many moral codes and severe prohibitions and sanctions of several ethnic groups.<sup>41</sup> In Ghana, and Africa at large, the duty to ensure that moral injunctions are observed resides not only with the traditional leaders (chiefs and priests), but with the entire community and especially, the ancestors and divinities.<sup>42</sup> Usually, the guardians of morality are the ancestors who punish deviance in one form or the other. Deviants are either struck with perennial sickness or are struck dead. For this reason, there is often strict compliance for fear of incurring the displeasure of the gods and the ancestors. Immoralities such as patricide, incest, bestiality and suicide require pacifications and punishment for the offenders. The members of the community ensure the rites are performed and punishment of the offenders by the leaders.

Punishment for offences varies depending on the offence. It ranges from a physical penalty, imposition of a fine and the offenders being ostracised or banished. Failure on the part of a chief or elders of society to enforce such norms and punish offenders in the community could be enough ground for them to lose their place of leadership. Nevertheless, much as the whole society has a collective responsibility to ensure sanctity in the community, the carrying out of the cleansing rites and punishment for offenders of the taboos and customs is led by the chiefs and traditional leaders.

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<sup>41</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra, Ghana: Sankofa, 1996); see also Joshua N. Kudadjie, Rebecca Y. Gannusah & Adekundu Alalade, eds., *Religion, Morality and West African Society*, (Accra, Ghana: Wesley, 2002), 56-76; Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Publishing, 1974), 34-45.

<sup>42</sup> Dean S. Gilliland, "Kings, Priest and Religion in Northern Nigeria", in *Religion and Society in Nigeria: Historical and Sociological Perspective*, eds. Jacob K. Olupona and Toyin Falola (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1991), 69.

This is to ensure effectiveness and also to avoid mob action on the perpetrators of crime.

Consequently, the Ghanaian Christian convert easily shares Paul's call to the community to remove the evil of sexual immorality from their midst. On the other hand, the attentive reader realizes that unlike in the traditional set-up where the chief, priest and elders get alarmed and seek pacification immediately, this was not the case in the Corinthian Christian community. Paul's silence on the role of the leaders in the matter and his call to the community as a whole to act seems to emphasise participatory leadership.

Earlier on, Paul told the Corinthians that they are the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12). Manus explains that the body imagery in Pauline anthropology shows that many parts come together to form the body, but each part performs different functions on its own to ensure the progress and health of the family.<sup>43</sup> This notion Mbiti has expressed philosophically that: "I am, because we are; and since we are, then I am."<sup>44</sup> Inferring from this, it can be construed that one member's wrong behaviour in the community of faith equally affects and undermines the moral integrity of the community considering its nature, just as Paul expressed metaphorically in verses 6 and 7.

From this perspective, Christians who read this text must appreciate that their morality affects the entire Christian community's morality. Therefore, the Church's leadership must endeavour to address all moral issues in ensuring sanctity within the faith community. The Church also has a responsibility to provide education that will help members grow spiritually, including assisting them to determine what they value, what their standards are, and what guides them in daily decision-making. This must call

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<sup>43</sup> Ukachukwu Chris Manus, "Rereading Rom 12, 3-21 with the African Cultural Eyes," in *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, ed. David Tuesday Adamo (New York: University Press of America, 2006), 202.

<sup>44</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 108-9.

for a radical change in a new believer's life because of his or her relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Using the Yoruba Christian community in Nigeria as an example, Manus has stressed the importance of the Christian leader in the community of faith today at the local front. He observes that:

He is invested with the authority to exhort the congregation whenever the opportunity arises. Whenever there is crisis, he, like Paul but illustrating from ancestral affiliation narratives enjoins the people of God to stay together, live together in spite of ethnic differences, pray together, dine and celebrate together at the table of the Lord for such was the ideal in traditional community life.<sup>46</sup>

From the above statement, African Christian leaders are responsible for exhorting their congregations and ensuring peace and unity among the people of God. To achieve this, they must be effective in addressing all moral issues that can destroy the Church's integrity. African Christians from their various ethnic and denominational backgrounds should see in Paul's call to responsibility an opportunity to contribute to the restoration of the Body of Christ to its full glory. It must be done with a high sense of solidarity and unity and adherence to communal value systems which promote the group and individual morality.

As African hermeneutics place great emphasis on the contemporary reader's context and the effect of the message on his/her experience,<sup>47</sup> the text contributes to understanding this cultural and moral element as the text sheds additional light on the influential and penetrating effect of immorality in any community. We can conclude that the spirit of the verses aligns with traditional

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<sup>45</sup> Judy J. Stamey, "Ethical Standards for the Minister and the Congregation," in *Church Administration Handbook*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. ed. Bruce P. Powers, Nashville: B&H, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Manus, "Rereading Rom 12, 3-21," 201.

<sup>47</sup> George Ossom-Batsa, "African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2, no.1 (2007): 99.

African morals in enhancing communal solidarity through an established and effective leadership system.

### **Conclusion**

The argument in the preceding pages is that the Church exists as a community of holy people, whose image must never be compromised by any member within the community. All members of the Church endeavour to uphold and protect the purity of the faith community. Consequently, the leadership of the church must be proactive in fostering upright living. This could be achieved through offering clear disciplinary guidelines to the members of the church. Discipline in the Church is imperative both for the eternal salvation of the offenders and the Church at large. Paul's command to excommunicate the erring offender is essentially an exercise of brotherly concern and love, and it calls for the sinner to repent and be restored. The command is disciplinary and not punitive.

As a spiritual organisation, the Church must ensure a functioning leadership structure with the mandate to address moral issues. Moral behaviour has rules and regulations which recognized institutions must enforce. The Church must address attitudes such as arrogance and divisions that may undermine the leaders' authority to ensure moral decorum. Finally, Ghanaian Christians are invited to deepen the notion of collective moral responsibility in Ghanaian society towards achieving moral probity in the Church.

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