

## ML403 A Mystery in Corinth

There was a man in Corinth who committed fornication with his step-mother. His sin was evil enough, but it caused some saints to become “puffed up” against other members. Here’s some of what Paul said concerning this matter:

*And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you [1Co 5:2].*

Some already know this, but one major reason for the Communion Service is to rid the church of those who sin but won’t repent. Paul’s judgment is clear; the wicked man must repent or be removed from among the saints. However, the sacraments have no effect unless the saints mourn the Lord’s death.

So here’s the mystery: How could these believers, who operated all nine spiritual gifts [1Co1:7], not come together to remove this sinner from the church? Pride puffed the saints up— but the cause of their pride isn’t clear in the text.

Whatever the reason, this evil tare needed to repent or leave the church. Even so, Jesus made it clear no one should force him out of the church:

*“So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them” [Mt 13:27-29].*

### The Four Divisions

Paul established the Corinthian Church [1Co 4:15] and had written at least one letter to the saints before this one: “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators” [1Co 5:9].

Moreover, the saints had responded to his letter because “First Corinthians” was Paul’s response to several matters they had asked about: “Now concerning the **things** whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman” [1Co 7:1]. The pronoun “things” confirms they had other problems as well as this man’s fornication.

Concerning one cause of their problems, Paul learned about this from another source: “For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them [which are of the house] of Chloe, that there are contentions among you” [1Co 1:11]. And the next verse reveals the cause of these contentions: “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; & I of Apollos; & I of Cephas; & I of Christ” [1Co 1:12].

Apparently, Peter and Apollos had ministered often enough in Corinth for personal bonds to form between them and the saints. Major divisions had occurred as a result. Some had bonded with Peter, some with Paul, some with Apollos, and those who hadn’t bonded with either of these groups had “latched onto” Christ.

The contentions were between the four groups. Except for the 4th group, the members of each group favored the lifestyle of one elder over the lifestyles of the other two elders. The saints in each group hadn’t understood that the teachings of all the elders were for the edification of all the saints.

*“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” [1Co 3:5-9].*

The question is: “What did the saints in each group see in the elder they favored that led them to glory in men and not in God? “That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” [1Co 1:31].

Consider that Paul was celibate; Peter was married; Apollos was exceptionally wise; and Christ was Christ. Thus, the following was the probable scenario: Paul’s group gloried in having denied themselves the sexual benefits of marriage; Peter’s group gloried in the freedom that had not to belong with Paul’s group; Apollo’s group gloried in the wisdom to be free from the attitudes of Paul and Peter’s groups, and Christ’s group gloried in their understanding that Jesus had made them free from the constant bickering they saw in the other three groups.

That scenario may not be exact, but it’s close enough to solve the mystery in Corinth. That is, how could saints in Paul’s group condone sin of the man who had slept with his stepmother?

Again, the saints in Paul’s group gloried in celibacy. They may have thought themselves as loving the Lord more than either of the other three groups [1Co 7:32; 7:40]. Think of the gossip that must have erupted in the three groups when they learned that someone in Paul’s group couldn’t live up to the standard that had been set for him.

The saints in Paul’s were caught in an evil situation. They couldn’t condemn this sinner without admitting that they were not any holier or devoted than those in the other groups. “Knowledge puffeth up” [1Co 8:1], and “pride blinds the mind” [this writer’s proverb]. And, they couldn’t admit the error of their attitude without humbling their prideful minds.

## ML209 A Mystery in Corinth

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Check this out: Paul devoted one entire chapter of this epistle [1 Co 7:1-40] to correct the understanding of all the saints concerning this matter. Moreover, we know that his words reveal the Lord's views because we believe that God inspired all scripture [2Ti 3:16].

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