

Saint Paul chastises the Corinthians for the reports he is receiving of their immorality. The issue presented to him is one of incest. In telling them how sinful it is, Paul is not teaching anything that is new to Christianity. The prohibition in writing echoes back to the teaching of the Levites as written down in the Book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy is the 5th book in the Old Testament. The name translates to “copy of the Law.” The book is Moses farewell address to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land. In the Promised Land, they will encounter people of other cultures and so Moses is reminding them of their covenant with God and how they are to keep the Commandments. Israelites show their love of God by keeping his Commandments (Footnote to 27:15-26). They will be blessed if they do so. However, they will be cursed if they abandon God’s teaching for sinful ways. The deadly sins that are highlighted include:

- Idolatry – no one is to use their hands to craft a graven image of a false God.
- Dishonoring one’s parents.
- Being dishonest in matters of property. “Cursed be anyone who moves a neighbor’s boundary markers!” (Dt 27:17).
- Taking advantage of a blind person by misleading them.
- Mistreating an orphan, a widow or a foreigner who is living among the Israelites is a sin against justice.
- Only marital relations proper to a husband and wife are allowed. Cursed are those who commit bestiality and incest.
- Killing a neighbor is wrong whether done in anger or more deliberately through ambush. Accepting payment to kill another is just as bad.
- Finally, “Cursed be anyone whose actions do not uphold the words of this law!” (26).

For the devout Jew all the commandments were to be kept with equal care for all ultimately deal with man’s relationship to God. “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength” (Dt 6:4-5).

As Paul speaks to the Corinthians, we come to a similar conclusion. A man living improperly with his father’s wife is very immoral. And the entire community is called to task for accepting this. Paul challenges them to do better. “Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened” (1 Cor 5:7). Or in the words of the Catechism, “the evil of sin [is] unmasked in its true identity as humanity’s rejection of God and opposition to him” (386).

Jesus’ teaching also connects us to the Law and Deuteronomy. When asked which of the commandments is the greatest, Jesus quotes Moses. “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22: 37-39). A footnote explains: “Jesus goes beyond the extent of the question put to him and joins to the greatest and the first commandment a second, that of love of neighbor... The double commandment is the source from which the whole law and the prophets are derived.”

In our Gospel, the scribes and Pharisees find fault with Jesus for healing on the sabbath. The way we demonstrate our love of God is by showing love to our neighbors and helping them as best we can. And so, Jesus has the man with the withered hand stretch it out and heals it. For him to do anything less would be wrong.

Going back to our earlier list from Deuteronomy, we may look at the actions of Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees through the same set of blessings and curses.

- Idolatry – the scribes and Pharisees have twisted the Law into an idol and thus put forward a false image of God by finding fault with the healing on the sabbath.
- Jesus honors his Father by caring for the one who is ill.
- The scribes and Pharisees take advantage of others by misleading them. They are the ones who are blind.
- It is a sin of injustice not to help the man with the withered hand.
- Cursed are the scribes and Pharisees who are enraged and will let that anger boil into a plot to crucify Jesus.

Clearly, the Law of Love compels us to live morally and to show our love for God by loving our neighbor.