1 Corinthians 5:9

Dear Culture Contrarians:

Paul wrote things that embarrass me. The phrase “I wrote to you in the letter” in 1 Corinthians 5:9 refers to a letter that Paul wrote to them, which we do not have. Not everything Paul wrote was inspired by the Holy Spirit. I’m sure he wrote lists to pick up materials for tent making; Home Depot lists weren’t inspired. Neither were the two missing Corinthian letters. We have letters 2 and 4 in our Bible, with 1 and 3 referred to in these biblical letters.

In the missing letter, Paul wrote something the Corinthians mis-applied. He had previously written to them and told them to not keep company (mingle together, associate, keep company with, fellowship) with “pornois.” In the non-Jewish world of the Greek writers, such as Aristophanes, Aeschines, Demosthenes, and Xenophanes, the term Paul uses refers to a male prostitute. *Strong’s Greek Notes* (4205) defines the term as “a man who prostitutes his body to another’s lust for hire.” Based on usage, it seems reasonable to me that this is what Paul had in mind.

This gets worse. There were people in the church of Corinth who were engaged in this sort of sin. He names some other sinful people as well: coveters, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards and extortioners. Bear in mind that Corinth, by today’s standards, was not a large church. The Corinthians mis-applied Paul’s statement by thinking this meant they were supposed to break off contact with unbelievers who did these sins. While Paul argues elsewhere, “don’t be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33), that is not his point here. Here he argues that believers should not fellowship—not even to eat together—with believers who do such acts. Don’t keep company with anyone who has been named or has been designated as a brother who behaves in such an evil way.

Church people are called upon to expel from their local church any male prostitutes, coveters, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards and extortioners. If our own culture continues its current course, we may find ourselves in legal hot water for following our Apostle. What else is new?!

My love to you all,

Marvin