

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE

(Based on J. Allen, *Survey of 1 Corinthians*)

**TEXT: 1 COR. 5:1-13**

### INTRODUCTION:

1. In our society today, discipline is a dirty word.
2. Several yrs ago, bro. Ross Anderson wrote: "If there is one thing that is noticeable in American homes today, both Christian and otherwise, it is the lack of proper discipline. The consequent results of this failure are quite clear also: disrespect, selfishness, rebellion against all forms of authority." (*Gospel Advocate*, 8/23/79, p. 516)
3. Unfortunately, the same can be said of many congregations of the Lord's church.
4. Because there has been such a lack of discipline; and regrettably a poor handling of church discipline, we have allowed sin to remain in the camp.
5. Centuries ago Israel learned a hard lesson by allowing sin to remain in the camp.
  - 1) With their conquest of the city of Jericho, God had warned that nothing was to be taken from the city (**Josh 6:18-19**).
  - 2) But a man named Achan violated God's explicit warning (**Josh. 7:1**), and as a result, brought devastation to Israel.
  - 3) 36 men died when about 3,000 men went against Ai.
  - 4) It wasn't until Achan and all his were put to death that the sin was purged from the children of Israel.
  - 5) God did not tolerate sin in the camp.
6. In the New Testament, we learn of a situation that had arisen in the church at Corinth, and the instructions given by the Lord's apostle as to how to deal with that sin and unrepentant sinner.
7. Read **1 Cor. 5:1-13**

### DISCUSSION:

#### I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM (5:1-2).

- A. Paul had evidently heard of this situation from the house of Chloe (**1 Cor. 1:11**).
- B. The problem was fornication, a term which refers to illicit sexual relations; referring to any sexual relationship outside the bond of marriage (cf. **Heb. 13:4**).
- C. The situation that existed, Paul said, was not even named among the Gentiles.
  1. "In early times, Roman law would allow an individual to marry as close as his second cousin. By the time Paul wrote 1 Cor., one could legally marry a first cousin. Claudius Caesar (41-54 A.D.), married his brother's daughter, but he had to get permission from the Roman senate to do so." (J.Allen, *Survey of 1 Cor.*)
  2. Cicero had harsh words for such marriages: "Oh incredible wickedness, and unheard of in all experience." (Ibid.)
  3. But what was happening in Corinth, within the congregation was not even named; that is uttered or mentioned, by those of the world!
- D. One of the Christians had his father's wife.
  1. We note that it doesn't say his mother; and, many scholars believe it likely refers to a man's stepmother.
  2. One such instance, recorded in Scripture in the Old Testament, refers to a man's stepmother as his "father's wife."
  3. And it should be noted as well that it is clearly distinguished from one's mother (**Lev. 18:7-8**).

- E. Especially disturbing in all of this, is that Paul say that this relationship was commonly reported, indicating that it was probably known to those who were unbelievers.
  - 1. Think of the impact this would have upon the community and its perception of the Lord's church.
  - 2. This wasn't just a common situation, but one that clearly was even abhorrent to those of the world!
- F. Instead of the Corinthians mourning over this situation, they were puffed up.
  - 1. Based upon the context of the discussion, all the way from chapter one, these brethren were so preoccupied with their party factions, and their glorification in man's wisdom, that they failed to deal with what was going on, so to speak, "right under their noses."
  - 2. A great evil was being permitted to exist in the congregation; and for whatever reason, it was being ignored.
- G. Paul indicates that these brethren should be mourning over this situation; from a Greek word lit. meaning, "to grieve, to wail." (Ibid.)
  - 1. It is the kind of sorrow that one would find in a death.
  - 2. For example: we find such sorrow among the disciples at the death of Jesus (**Mark 16:10**).
  - 3. "An easy-going attitude to sin is always dangerous. It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked by it." (Barclay, *First Corinthians*)
  - 4. When we become numb to sin, we stand in great danger.
  - 5. We are often reminded of this when we look at how far things have gone on TV; things shown today which would have brought shock and outrage years ago.
  - 6. As long as what we see and hear still bothers us, then there is reason for hope to continue.

## **II. SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM - WITHDRAWAL (5:3-5).**

- A. Although Paul was not present in Corinth when this was written, the judgment was already pronounced.
  - 1. Paul was an apostle, and as such was guided into all truth (**John 16:13**).
  - 2. **2 Cor. 11:5** *For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.*
- B. As a further affirmation, Paul declares this instruction *in the name of Christ*.
  - 1. *In the name of* -- by Christ's authority.
  - 2. "In this phase we have the authority behind discipline. The Lord is the beginning and the end of authority behind discipline. Disfellowshipping is not man's idea; it's God's idea!" (Jim McGuiggan, *First Corinthians*)
- C. Withdrawing fellowship is not an easy matter, but we must recognize it as a biblical command (cf. **2 Thess. 3:6; Titus 3:10-11**).
- D. Notice that the action to be taken was in the assembly, when the church was *gathered together*.
- E. Notice carefully the course of action to be taken: *deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*.
  - 1. When the church withdraws and disfellowships someone; that person then is alone, that he or she may be ashamed.
  - 2. Let's remember that Satan is the prince of this world (**John 12:31**); or as Paul

refers to him, *the god of this world* (**2 Cor. 4:4**).

3. In **Col. 1:13**, Paul refers to satan's realm as *the power of darkness*.
  4. When one becomes a Christian, they leave the darkness and come into the light.
  5. The Corinthians were to *deliver*, i.e., *hand over* this brother to satan; that is, send him back into the world of darkness by treating him as though he were a worldly person.
  6. In the act of withdrawing fellowship, the congregation is acknowledging that this brother, at least for the present, is satan's servant (because of a lack of repentance).
- F. Paul then makes it abundantly clear, that this action is so that the spirit *may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*.
1. When the church disfellowships the offending party, that person is then alone that they might be ashamed.
  2. The goal is to cause that brother or sister to realize their sin, and be ashamed that they repent of their sin.
- G. When we take such an action, one of three things happens:
1. The brother or sister does repent and they return to Christ.
  2. The brother or sister gets angry and hardens their heart.
  3. The church does not follow God's directions and ends up encouraging the erring Christian in their sins.
  4. If church discipline is done properly, and the erring Christian repents, prayerfully that brother or sister will live faithfully the rest of their life that in the day of the Lord (the day of judgment), they might be saved.
- H. When we carefully examine what Paul is writing here, we realize that church discipline, when handled properly, is not an act of hatred, but an act of love!
1. It is being done with the express purpose of causing someone in error to repent that they might be saved.
  2. Unfortunately, it is not regarded that way as Christians do not want to obey the biblical command of God.
  3. I would remind you that this is not an option, but a directive of the Lord (cf. **Col. 3:17**).

### **III. THE ILLUSTRATION OF LEAVEN (5:6-8).**

- A. Paul evidently uses the figure of the Passover Feast because the time of the Passover was near when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (**1 Cor. 16:8**).
- B. "At the beginning of Passover, the Hebrews were commanded to rid their homes of all leaven (**Exod. 12:15**)."  
(Allen)
  1. Leaven appears to have been a symbol of the corruptions of Egypt.
  2. In Paul's illustration, leaven represents that which was evil.
  3. The thought being presented: "If the Corinthians were to be purged of the leaven of evil, they had to exclude the immoral brother from their fellowship." (Ibid.)
  4. Just as leaven can effect the whole lump, so can sin end up effecting the whole church.
- C. Paul urged these brethren to "purge out the old leaven."
  1. The means of this was with the emphasis upon sincerity and truth.
  2. The word *sincerity* in ancient times meant that "which is cleansed by much rolling

and shaking to and fro in a sieve.”

3. When combined with truth, it exposes that which is right from that which is clearly wrong.
4. We know ourselves that if you run the contents of something in a sieve, that it separates the elements.
5. It is also interesting that *sincerity* also had its basis in that which “was held up to the sunlight and was proved and approved.” (Ibid.)
6. As we apply the truth with sincerity, we must deal with the leaven or infection of sin!

#### **IV. THE LIMITATION OF FELLOWSHIP (5:9-13).**

- A. In a previous letter, Paul had warned the Corinthian Christians about mixing with those who were immoral, which was very prevalent in that community at that time.
  1. Even so, he isn't saying they weren't to have any contact with the immoral because if that were the case they would have to go out of the world.
  2. But in this letter Paul is specifically addressing Christians; those who were impure, swindlers, idolaters, those with a foul tongue, a drunkard, or even a thief.
  3. Such was reprehensible conduct, and Paul even went so far as to say that one should not even eat with such a man.
  4. “Saints should not eat with” such a “person in their home, his home, or a restaurant or any other place. They are not to socialize with him at all.” (Ibid.)
  5. **2 Thess. 3:14-15**
  5. If one is to have contact with such an individual, this makes it clear that it is to be for the purpose of admonishing that brother or sister, again with the express hope of their repentance and subsequent salvation.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

1. When we have to exercise church discipline, after all other efforts have been exhausted, then we should do so, not with a spirit of malice, but with love.
2. I would encourage every Christian to pray for those who we withdraw fellowship from, that they would repent of their sins before it is everlastingly too late for their souls.
3. May we not forget the value of a soul (**Matt. 16:26**).
4. Every soul is important to God (**2 Pet. 3:9**).
5. If the leaven of sin is in your life, I plead with you to purge it out and repent of it.