

DEALING WITH SIN IN THE CHURCH  
May 28/2000

INTRO: Let me briefly review the last message: 1 We must recognize that it is not what I think but what the Bible says that is most important. The Bible is authoritative. 2 Then, if we are willing to correct publically where wrong is done, are we ready to commend publically where good is achieved? 3 Third, we must always remember that the purpose of dealing with sin is corrective and redemptive in nature and it should never be labeled as "kicked out of the church." 4 Fourth, to be most effective it is important that the leadership of the church is united on this matter. 5 When a church decides to take the Scriptures seriously on this matter and finds discipline necessary, it is good to be prepared to be labeled as having fallen under legalism or even as a cult. 6 Our last point was to remember that all discipline should proceed from love. We said that true love is not the strong emotional ties to the person to be disciplined but a willingness to do that which will benefit the wrongdoer.

This morning we want to look at the seventh and last prerequisite before we begin looking at the Scriptures on our topic of dealing with sin in the church. It is the matter of judging. There is no possible way of obeying the Scriptures on dealing with wrong in the church without making a judgement and if the Scriptures teach we are not to judge we are in a dilemma. So before we move into the actual matters for which discipline are taught we must:

H. Understand the Need For Judgement

If there is confusion or misunderstanding on the matter of church discipline in our age, there is an even greater confusion regarding judgement. Josh McDowell, who wrote the book *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, and speaks to college young people all over America says that for many years when he asked for the verse of Scripture that immediately came to their minds it was John 3:16. That is not surprising. Today, however, he said that has changed. The verse most often quoted today, he said in a video tape in the conference, *Stealing The Mind of America*, is "Judge not that you be not judged."

Let us read those passages of Scripture that might give the thought that the Bible is against judging (Matthew 7:1-2; Romans 2:1; 1 Cor. 4:5). By now you might say, "Well, the matter is clear. Nobody is to judge anybody at all!

Well, consider Matthew 7:1-2 again. Consider verse 6. We are not to give what is holy to the dogs. How can one obey that command without making a judgement? The answer is that you cannot. Look at verse 15, "Beware of false prophets..." How can you know someone is a false prophet without making a judgement call? You cannot. So clearly the Lord is not forbidding all judgement.

So what is this command not to judge, all about? Well, look who is not to judge (read 3-4). It is a person who has bigger problems than the one he is judging (comparison of plank to speck). No one likes to be judged by an unjust judge and that is what we have here. Now look at verse 5 (read). Obviously it is hypocritical judgement. Then consider in verse five that this passage actually teaches that judgement be made, but by righteous people. It instructs the judge to judge himself first (remove plank) and then he will see clearly to remove the speck from his brother's eye.

How would you like someone to try to get a speck out of your eye if he had a big chunk of sawdust in his own eye? You know that such an effort is going to make things worse not better. So this passage does not condemn all judgement. It condemns judgement by people who themselves have worse problems than those they are judgeing. Listen to the commentators, Jamison, Faucet and Brown on this passage, "Provided we eschew this unlovely spirit, we are not only warrented to sit in judgement upon a brother's character and actions, but in the exercise of a necessary discrimination are often constrained to do so for our own guidance. *It is the violation of the law of love involved in the exercise of a censorious disposition which alone is condemned.*"

Our next passage is Romans 2:1. In Romans 2 Paul calls the one who judges inexcusable. Again the context clarifies his meaning. In Romans 1 Paul has shown that the Gentiles are all under sin. This is the purpose of 1:18-32. Then Paul turns his attention to the hypocritical and misguided Jew who treats all Gentiles as dogs while the Jew himself has nothing but a legalistic righteousness, viewed as filthy rags by God. The Jew here was in no condition to judge the Gentiles. In chapter 2 he will show how the Jew is equally guilty with the Gentile. All of this to ultimately show that "...every mouth may be stopped (Jew and Gentile) and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19).

In the context of Romans 2:1 the judge is the Jew and he is judging the Gentile. He won't eat with the Gentile because he is a dog but the same Jew is an unsaved man living by tradition and not the Word of God. You might wish to read Jesus' scathing denunciation in Matthew 23 regarding these same people Paul is dealing with in Romans 2:1 and then you will understand why they were not to judge.

The last passage we will consider is 1 Corinthians 4:5. There were many problems in the Corinthian church. One of those problems was how to esteem God's ministers in right perspective. This problem is dealt with in 2:1-4:5. Some said, "I like Apollos". Another said, "I think Peter is the best speaker." Another said, "Paul is the greatest." In 2:1-3:4 Paul shares how speakers should use wisdom. Then in 3:5-20 he talks about the ministers place in God's plan. Then in 3:21-4:5 he speaks of how the people should view the various speakers and ministers. He begins with the instruction, "Let no one glory in men." In 4:1 he says they are to consider them as Christ's servants and stewards of the mysteries of God. Then he goes on to say, "With me it is a little thing if you consider me a better speaker or a worse speaker. I don't even weigh my own speaking against that of others." And in verse 5 he closes with the instruction to judge nothing before the time. I would summarize his thoughts like this: "Some day God will judge all speakers and ministers. Let God be the judge as to who is the best speaker. I don't even judge myself to see where I think I fit."

Now, on the flip side, take Paul's statements in other parts of Corinthians and another picture emerges. In 1 Cor. 5 we have a Christian who has taken his step mother as wife. The Corinthians, rather than expressing grief were proud of their Christian liberties and what they allowed (5:2). Paul is aghast when he hears of this and says, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, concerning him who has so done this deed." In verse 12 he makes clear that the church is to judge those who are inside the church. In verse 13 he tells them to make their judgement and put this man out immediately. In chapter 6 Paul deals with the matter of the Corinthians going to the law courts before the unbelievers. Then he makes some of the most profound statements to be found in the Bible regarding the Christian: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters."

Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life."

It is the sad testimony of the Christian church today that adulteress situations, immorality, and many other issues clearly judged by the Bible are tolerated in the church under such statements as, "Judge not that you be not judged." Surely the most simplistic and unlearned believer should be able to see that it cannot mean we must make no judgements in the Church or as individual believers. How would Jesus and Paul say, "Judge not at all, not ever," and then Paul would say, "I have already judged this man." Or, "Get with it and judge your own cases in the church. Do you not know that the believer will judge the world and angels?" How would Paul say, "Judge nothing before the time..." and then in 1 Cor. 11:31 say, "If we would judge ourselves we would not be judged?" All of those statements must be interpreted in their context and in the larger context of the entire Scriptures.

So, we have looked at the last prerequisite to church discipline I have set out for us. It is clearly obvious that the misunderstanding of judging must be understood before church discipline will be used again for that purpose for which God set it out. And while such misunderstandings rule, and sentence against wrong is not speedily executed, therefore wrong is ever on the increase in the church.

## II. THE PROCESS OF DEALING WITH SIN

INTRO: We are going to look at three broad categories of wrong to be dealt with: 1. In the interpersonal realm 2. In the instructional realm 3. In the individual realm. It is absolutely essential that we understand the different categories of wrong and the treatment prescribed for each case.

### A. In The Interpersonal Realm

#### 1. The Passage (Matthew 18:15-20)

#### 2. The Problem

##### a. What it is not

We are not dealing here with personality conflicts. Personality conflicts and such-like become the responsibilities of the individuals to work out (Phil. 4:2). Paul and Barnabus (Acts 15:36-40).

#### b. What it is

The passage, 18:15a, says, "...if your brother sins (hamartia) against you." Here we have one Christian sinning against another. It is an interpersonal problem.

I believe we must be very careful here. We must not fly after everyone for everything they might do wrong. There should be, in Christianity, a gentel forbearance. That is a passing over of certain wrongs, giving time for the person to grow spiritually (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13). However, there are some trivial things that one may deem necessary to deal with for the other person's good.

It might be helpful to classify interpersonal wrongs into three categories. Trivial things that any mature person should not fuss over. On the other side are things that clearly must be dealt with. And in between those two are those things one is unsure about. I have dealt with some issues and cleared the thing right up. I have dealt with some that have made me very cautious.

And so our question now is this: How do I know whether I should forbear or whether I should deal with this situation? I would like to give my oppinion after some years of experience in my own life. If a brother has sinned against you and the matter lies heavy on your heart. No matter which way you turn it is there and if you do not deal with it, it will turn into bitterness, then it needs to be dealt with.

### 3. The Procedure

The procedure is laid out so clearly as to present very little difficulties in interpretation.

#### a. Step one

In this first step there are some very important precepts to be obeyed. The first is to go to the person who has wronged you and tell him his fault between you and him alone. Let me underscore the second thing, that such things do not belong to others.

I sometimes wonder what would happen to relationships in the church if this simple

step were obeyed. Almost all problems can be solved on this level.

If you should have a circumstance in your life where you feel you need to carry out the instructions of this passage, here is what I would encourage you to do. Contact the person and make arrangements to meet together. Then pray about this matter and when the appointed time comes follow through.

The next question we naturally have is, "What if the person will not reconcile?" Well, we go to step two.

b. Step two

If you cannot come to a settlement of the matter, then the text says to take one or two with you. Find a Christian brother or sister or two and make another appointment. Take the matter up again with the witnesses along as well. This will verify to the church that this case does need further attention.

If in this second meeting no resolve can be reached, then the third and last step is to be taken.

c. Step three

The third and last step is to take it to the church. At this point it becomes a church matter. If the church receives no ear by the offender, we have in this text a clear prescription to be followed, and it is the first area of church discipline we will be considering.

In the next message we will complete this matter and move on to another.

CONCL: We have given for consideration seven prerequisites to dealing with sin in the church. 1. The Bible is our authority 2. We must beware of extremes 3. We need to understand the purpose 4. For maximum affect we need united church leadership 5. We should be ready to be labeled, even by other believers 6. We must discipline in love and 7. We need to understand the matter of judgment by Christians. We have concluded that the Scripture which says, "Judge not that you be not judged" is not a cover all statement and needs to be interpreted in the context of the rest of Scripture.