

DEALING WITH SIN IN THE CHURCH
June 18/2000

INTRO: Since a number of weeks have gone by since our last message in this topic of dealing with sin in the church permit me to give a brief review. We began this series by considering a number of things that need to be in place before church discipline can be most effectively administered. These were: recognize that the Scriptures are our authority; beware of extremes; if we will deal with wrong doing are we ready to commend for well doing?; understand the purpose; united leadership; be prepared to be labeled a legalist; discipline in love; and understand the matter of judgement.

The first matter of discipline we looked at was when one Christian sins against another. This is wrongdoing in the interpersonal realm. The Scriptures give a three step process to resolve such matters, the final being excommunication if there is no repentance. This morning we are going to consider wrongdoing in the instructional realm, the area of teaching or passing on spiritual instruction. Let me explain the gravity of this matter.

Recently I was ready to go home after work and I got in my old van, turned on the key to start it and something did not sound good at all. As a matter of fact, the engine would not turn over and after a few tries I thought I better get it checked out. Well, the mechanic picked it up and took it to the shop. What I had was a machanical problem. To fix that kind of prolem takes mechanical expertise. And when the problem is found it is fixed mechanically.

Some years ago I had considerable stomach problems and when it got bad enough I decided to have the problem looked into. I did not go to a mechanic. It was a physical problem and of course I went to a medical doctor. Well the doctor was able to diagnose the problem and he gave me medication and in a short while everything was fine. It was a physical problem.

Well, I am not a mechanic, nor am I a medical doctor. I am a minister of the Word of God. People come to me with problems too. These problems are spiritual in nature. I suppose I could honestly say that my task is more challenging than that of the mechanic or the medical doctor. The range of problems can be so vastly different and the means of diagnosing the problems are often so subjective that it is almost impossible to diagnose properly.

The mechanic fixes problems by replacing parts or repairing broken parts. Usually this is more objective than fixing

spiritual problems. The medical doctor fixes problems by diagnosing the physical body. When he has found the problem he determines if surgery or medicine will fix the problem. Usually the problem and the solutions are more objective than those that occur in the spiritual realm. But in the spiritual realm, fixing problems and helping people, is often very subjective.

The mechanical and medical world is subject to scientific rules and laws. But the spiritual realm is not subject to such rules and laws. Furthermore, the spiritual realm is the realm in which Satan and his demons operate. Every good thing in the spiritual realm has a distortion of one kind or another which are often extremely hard to detect. Today, in the church we are spewing out psychological jargon that is supposed to be spiritual help and it is very hard to discern between right and wrong. The reason being that in the spiritual realm we have an enemy that comes dressed in sheep's clothing but he is a wolf by nature.

The mechanic has his tools and access to parts to fix the problems brought to him. The doctor has surgical tools or medications to fix problems and the pastor or teacher has the Word of God. And to go beyond that, the pastor not only fixes problems but seeks to cause continual health and growth. And all of this is administered by instruction or teaching.

Now you can imagine what can happen if a doctor gives the wrong prescription or makes a mistake with the knife or needle. Can you imagine as well what happens when the pastor or teacher gives wrong instruction? We can see then what an important thing it is for the church to keep its teaching pure. From there it also becomes clear that those who teach wrong doctrine in the church must be dealt with. The question is, how are they to be dealt with? How does God view doctrinal deviation and what is to be done about it?

B. In The Instructional Realm

1. The Passages (Titus 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:20)

I invite you to turn with me to Titus 3:10-11. "Reject a divisive man (an heretic according to the KJV) after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self condemned."

A second passage is 1 Timothy 1:18-20. "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some

having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

2. The Problem

Now let us go to Titus 3:10 and consider first the word translated *divisive* in the NKJV or *heretic* in the KJV. The Greek word is *heiretikos*. It comes originally from a word meaning to choose. Permit me to read a comment here from the Jamison, Faucett and Brown commentary. They say that this word, "originally meant a division resulting from individual self-will; the individual doing and teaching what he *chose*, independent of the teaching and practice of the Church. In course of time it came to mean definitely 'heresy' in the modern sense; and in the later Epistles it has almost assumed this meaning. The heretics of Crete, when Titus was there, were in doctrine, followers of their own self-willed 'questions' reprobated in vs. 9, and immoral in practice."

We have entered a problem that involves the realm of instruction, or passing on information that is meant for spiritual nurture and edification. Wrong teaching, like a doctor who prescribes the wrong medicine, can be fatal. But the doctor only endangers the physical body whereas the teacher endangers the eternal destiny of souls or the rewards of believers.

Consider for a moment Revelation 2:2. John is writing here of the church at Ephesus and that they cannot bear those who are evil and that they have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars. The Lord is pleased with this church because they did not allow false teachers into their midst. In verse 6 John writes, "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." Ryrie notes that the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolas ...according to early church fathers. These were apparently a sect which advocated license in matters of Christian conduct, including free love..." Of course the deeds of the Nicolaitans proceed from teaching.

Notice also the Lord's diagnosis of the church of Pergamos in verses 12-14 (read). The major problem in this church was doctrinal. This church allowed wrong teaching within. It is interesting

that in Revelation 1 the Lord is described. And when addressing each church, some part of the description of the Lord is used for each church. When the church at Pergamos is addressed in 2:12 the opening words are, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword..." This is no doubt a reference to the Word of God and this description is doubtless used because this church failed to use and obey the Word of God. If they had, they would not have allowed these false teachers in their midst.

3. The Procedure

The question that now comes is what is to be done with a person who persists in doctrinal heresy? When we looked at the area of problems in the interpersonal realm, we saw a three step procedure. But in the case of wrong teaching, according to Titus 3:10, two admonitions are to be given. The word for admonition is *nouthesia*. It means to put in mind. The wrong teaching needs to be exposed and the correct teaching put in mind. And so as I understand it, the church would make a decision regarding this person as to what is wrong and what is right. Then they would confront him with the correct teaching and give him time to change. After a while, if no change takes place then they would do this again. If these two admonitions brought no results then we come to the prescription given for such persons. I would also think that this person would not be permitted to teach while correction was in progress.

4. The Prescription

a. Titus 3:10

We come back now to Titus 3:10, "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition." The prescription given here is that such a person, if he does not change his ways, is to be rejected.

Let us look at the word reject first. It is the Greek word *paraiteomai*. Bauer Arndt and Ginrich say that in Titus 3:10 it has the sense to "discharge, dismiss, drive out." There is no sense of mercy here. It is firm. Such a person must not be tolerated at all if he does not turn from the error of his way.

The mood of the verb to reject is imperative. That means it is not an option, it is a command. Furthermore, it is in the present tense meaning it should be carried out now.

What is interesting is that this command is addressed, not to the church, but to Titus, the pastor. It seems that the responsibility of detecting wrong teaching falls to the pastor and he is to see to it that such a person is rejected. (*though the church should be involved).

b. 1 Timothy 1:18-20

Let's consider this instruction in light of 1 Timothy 1:18-20 (read). Paul is committing a charge to Timothy. The charge is given in earlier verses (read 1:3-4). The charge was that he should see to it that sound doctrine was taught in the church. We have here one of the duties of a pastor. Sound doctrine is sound teaching. It is Biblically accurate teaching. Paul lists three things that are essential in a Bible teacher's life (v. 5). The first is love from a pure heart. The second is love from a good conscience and the third is love from a sincere faith.

In verse 6 Paul indicates that some of the teachers have strayed from those three essentials. They desire to be teachers but do not understand what they say nor the things they affirm. Some time a man came to my office. He hoped to gain me to his camp regarding a certain issue. Then we got off on another topic and he told me how some people so foolishly supported a certain version of the Bible. I said to him, "You would be wise not to talk about this because you do not even know what you are talking about." I myself have greatly erred in such matters. May the Lord ever teach me to understand those things I so strongly affirm before I enter them.

In verse 18 Paul commits the charge to see that sound doctrine is taught according to the prophecies made about Timothy that by them he might wage a good warfare. He is to do this in the context of having faith and a good conscience. Then he says that some (teachers) have rejected these concerning the faith and have made shipwreck.

Doctrinal shipwreck is a very serious offense. It is extremely serious because it eats like a cancer into the lives of other people. Consider 2 Timothy 2:15-18 (read). From this passage it is clear that a person can make shipwreck of the faith. But not only that, such a person can affect the faith of others and cause them to shipwreck as well.

That brings us to consider the prescription for such a sin. We find this in 1 Timothy 1:20. Paul is speaking of Hymenaeus and Alexander and at the close of the verse he says, "...whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

Paul speaks here of delivering to Satan. This is what we call excommunication. There is another passage that speaks of handing a disobedient Christian over to Satan. In this case it is gross immorality. It is found in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul says in verse 4, *In the name of Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.* We are going to look at this in greater detail when we come to this in our next topic of dealing with wrong in the individual realm. Suffice it here to say that such a person is to be handed over to Satan.

Now our text says, "...whom I have handed over to Satan..." The indication is that Paul did this. In the Corinthian passage Paul instructs the Church to hand over to Satan. A good friend of mine, a spiritual leader for many years, feels that this speaks of unilateral action. That is, he feels Paul took this matter into his own hands. His point is that if a church does not exercise church discipline, then individuals may do so. I guess I would put out a caution here. I think it is more probable that Paul was at that particular church at the time or he was called there to deal with this matter and that he, in conjunction with the local church, delivered this person to Satan.

We have mentioned at the outset of this series that church discipline is always redemptive in nature. We will consider more of this in the next matter of discipline. In this passage we

note that Paul delivered them to Satan
"...that they may learn not to blaspheme..."
To blaspheme, according to Vine's Dictionary,
is used here, "...of those who speak
contemptuously of God or sacred things." I
believe here it is in the propagation of wrong
teaching. In this same chapter (1 Tim. 1:13)
Paul says that before he was a Christian he
was a blasphemer. The root word is the same
here. I think he is referring to his wrong
teaching in the days when he was Saul, before
he met Christ on the Damascus road.

The words, "...that they might learn..." might
well be translated, "...that they might be
disciplined..." The word *learn* is the Greek
word *paideuo*. Warren Wiersbe says the word
learn means to learn by discipline and that
is, no doubt, the intention here. In
excommunication the church gives to Satan the
right to inflict physical pain and sometimes
even death, if God permits. It is through the
infliction of pain that the erring saint is to
be brought back to the Lord.

There is a misunderstanding by some
commentators that the one who excommunicated
also inflicted physical pain and suffering on
the one who was excommunicated. Ellicott
writes, "But an Apostle and only an apostle
seems to have possessed the awful powers of
inflicting bodily suffering in the forms of
disease and death" (Vol. VIII:184). I do not
believe this was ever the case. The infliction
of physical pain and suffering, I believe is
done by Satan, and that only to the extent
that God allows. It is the church's duty to
excommunicate in cases prescribed by God but
the church is NEVER instructed to inflict
physical pain of any kind. The infliction of
pain belongs entirely to Satan and there only
as far as God allows.

CONCL: The problem we have looked at is one of doctrinal
deviation. It involves the teaching of false doctrine. This
is a very grievous sin and must be dealt with in the
church. The procedure is to approach such a person once,
then if necessary a second time. The remedial prescription
is to excommunicate such a person if they do not repent
after a second admonition. Excommunication includes handing
such a person over to Satan and give him right to the
physical body of this believer.

I close with a little story from David Klassen, a preacher from Russia with whom I traveled and who spent 10 years in Russian prisons. This little story does not have to do with wrong teaching but it illustrates what can happen when excommunication is practiced. This account revolves around something we might not see quite as serious as the Russian Mennonites did, although maybe we should. The matter was the habit of smoking. The church had taken a stand against smoking and a certain man in the congregation began to smoke. The ministers met with him and there was no respect and no repentance. After deliberation he was excommunicated.

This man worked with boilers and he was about to take a holiday. And so before he left on holidays he wanted to clean out the boilers. As he worked on one of the boilers he fell into the hot embers. Fortunately someone was near enough to hear his terrifying screams. When they reached down to take hold of his outstretched hands the cooked flesh just stripped off the bones of his fingers. The crew managed to get him out and to the hospital. He did not live long but before he died he called for the ministers of the church. When the ministers arrived, this man, who had lived in excommunication up to this point, repented of his wrongdoing and here as best I recall the story are some of his words, "I thank God he allowed me to burn for a little while so that I might repent and not burn forever."

I am not aware of any serious doctrinal problems in this church. But maybe this morning the Lord has already directed your attention to a matter that you need to take care of. May I encourage you to do it today.