

DEALING WITH SIN IN THE CHURCH
August 6, 2000

INTRO: We are continuing our series on the second point, the process of dealing with sin. We have considered the first area, that of interpersonal wrongdoing. We saw a three step process. Then we looked at wrongdoing in the instructional realm. Here we saw a two step process. A teacher or preacher who errs doctrinally is to be rejected after a first and second admonition.

This morning we will begin to view the realm of sin in the individual realm. The first type of situation we will be considering is a serious sin which affects the church. Romans 14:7 says that no person lives to himself and no person dies to himself. In other words, our lives affect others and so does our sin. When certain sins are committed, though they are not directly against another believer, they may affect the whole church. When these sins are of a serious nature, such a person is to be excommunicated from the church. It is this type of situation we will be looking at this morning.

C. In The Individual Realm

1. Matters Affecting the Church

There are at least two areas that affect the church outlined in Scripture. I have classed one as severe cases and the other as less severe cases. A certain lady said to her husband, "I have good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first?" Well, he wasn't willing to face the bad news first so he said, "I'll take the good news first." "Well," she said, "The good news is that the air bag on the car works."

We are not going to commit the same error and so we'll look at the most severe case first.

a. Severe Cases

- 1) The Passage (1 Cor. 5, read)
- 2) The Problem (1 Cor. 5:1-2)

The problem is that a certain man has taken his father's wife. We are given very few details other than that this man, a professing believer (v. 11), has married his step mother. Leviticus 18:8 clearly forbids such marriages.

The amazing thing is that the Corinthian church, which portrayed itself as such a spiritual church, did not even bat an eye at this situation. As a matter of fact, they seemed to even be proud of it (puffed up) according to verse 2.

There is a clear understanding given in verse 2 that before a church will deal with sin, their hearts must be caused to mourn about sin. Such mourning will result in action, and the action will be the removal of such a person from the church's fellowship.

3) The Procedure (1 Cor. 5:3-4)

Most of the procedure is given to us in verses 3-4. For the sake of time we will look only at these two verses and pull in several related thoughts from the rest of the chapter.

Our question is: What procedure does the Scripture give in dealing with such a serious case? First the gravity of such sins must be understood. This will cause deep mourning in the body that such a deed has happened in its midst (v. 2). Second, swift judgement should be made. If you were not here when I spoke on the prerequisites to church discipline, you will want to listen to the message on judgement. Today there is great misunderstanding on Christians judging Christians. In cases of gross immorality or wrongdoing, judgement should be swift.

In verse 3 Paul says, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present, concerning him who has done this deed." A hesitation of action in severe cases is itself a wrongdoing, and that by the church.

There is, as I see it, a common error made in cases of serious sin. When I cover the topic of church discipline in Bible school, it is not uncommon to have a student say that such a person should first be approached by one person, then two etc... In this passage I find no three step or even two step approach. It needs

immediate judgement and action. We see this in verses 4-5: *In the name of the Lord 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.*

Just this past week I received a church constitution from another conference. I had requested this constitution to see what order of action they prescribe when church leaders fall into sin. This constitution outlined two areas of wrongdoing that require church discipline and the process for both was taken from Matthew chapter 18, which deals with sin in the interpersonal realm. I believe that is a rather serious error and want warn against that approach later.

This passage is very instructive in giving the whole process of disciplining such wrongdoing. It tells us who is to do it; what is to be done; how it is to be done; when it is to be done; where this person is to be delivered to; and why such action is to be taken. We will take this passage in this same order.

a. Who

The main clause to which everything in verses 4-5 is attached is, "You deliver such a one..."

The word translated *deliver* is an infinitive rather than an imperative verb. However, I do believe it is correct that it has imperative force. An imperative verb always has an understood subject and it is *you*. In the words of our text, "...when you are gathered together..." we find out who the implied *you* in the imperative clause is. The *you* here is *humwn*, which is the plural form of *you*. I think there is no other alternative but that it is a reference to the Corinthian church.

In 2 Corinthians 2:1-11, Paul seems to be speaking about this same case. The

action prescribed by Paul has been taken. The offender has apparently repented. But 1 Corinthians 2:6 indicates that there was not unanimous agreement to this action being taken. Paul writes, "This punishment..." (better, this censure), which was inflicted by the majority..." So it seems that the majority agreed to this action and followed through, however, there was a minority that did not.

When Paul instructs the Corinthians with the words, "You deliver such a one to Satan..." he is speaking to all the Corinthians. The more members who agree and follow through on the action, the greater the affect of it. The obligation is laid on all the believers in the fellowship.

b. What

What is the Corinthian church to do? We are told that they are to, "...deliver such a one to Satan..." This gives us the prescription for this kind of wrongdoing in the church and we will look at this later.

c. How

In what manner are they to take such action? Shall they do this under the authority of the Apostle Paul? Shall they do it under the authority of the church? No, they are to do it "...in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." Twice in these two verses Paul uses the expression, "...our Lord Jesus Christ..." Did only the apostles have authority to excommunicate? No, Jesus Christ is "our" Lord. He is the Lord of the Corinthian church as well and has authorized them as well as Paul to take such action. Furthermore, Paul uses the full title, Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is speaking of the anointed Savior who is LORD. Vested in this name is all the authority and power of heaven. And they are to take this action in His name.

You see, we picture the Lord Jesus as the Lord of love who walks about with head bowed down, arms hanging low, and who always speaks softly and sweetly. We do not often hear of Him as the Lord of drastic action. But when Christians or professing Christians live in sin, the Scriptures picture Him as the Lord of order and prompt action.

Go with me to Matthew 23:14-29. Wow! Did you ever picture our Lord Jesus Christ like that? (John 2:13-16; Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15.) Those are three separate occasions. This did not only happen once. When it comes to dealing with certain kinds of wrongdoing the Lord had no patience whatsoever. That is what Paul is recommending here in our passage as we will see.

The action the Corinthians were instructed to take here is not out of keeping with the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in perfect keeping with His nature. It is exactly what He would do. When a church takes such action, and they do it properly, all of what our Lord Jesus Christ is and stands for, backs that action. That action is taken with the full authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

d. When

Paul tells us when this action is to take place. It is, (I give a literal translation here) "...when you (pl.) and my spirit are gathered together with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Before we look at those words I would like to give some advice from my own failures in the past regarding the duty of the individual believer when he or she hears of such wrongdoing before the church knows. My advice to you is to not approach the individuals involved yourself. When a wrong is done to you personally, that is another matter. When a person is living in sin which is not directly

against you, my advice is bring it to the church. If you are unsure of the information, there too, I would encourage, let the church check it out. There may be some exceptional cases, but by and large I think this is the best advice. If the individual approaches the matter, his relationship with that person and possibly many others is jeopardized.

There are several reasons for that advice. First, such wrongdoing is against the church, not a particular individual. Therefore the matter belongs to the church. If someone wrongs you individually, that matter does not belong to the church. It belongs to you. If nothing can be resolved after the second step, then it becomes a matter for the church. Second, the passage does not instruct individuals to deal with this but the church and third, from my own experience I would caution individual involvement in such matters.

"But", you might say, "Does not the Scripture encourage us to admonish one another?" Yes it does (Romans 15:14). This is not a case of admonition, it is a case of excommunication. "But", you might argue further with me, "Does not Galatians 6:1 say, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness..." Lord willing we will take that Scripture in a later message.

Well, so much for my advice to you. Consider now in our text, when excommunication is to take place. The church has been made aware of the situation. A meeting has been called. Then, when the church is gathered together, excommunication is to be exercised.

The text literally reads, "...when you and my spirit are gathered together..." Paul was physically removed from the Corinthians geographically. In 1 Corinthians 16:8

it is evident that Paul was in Ephesus when he got the message. But when he instructed them in what to do with this matter he assured them that he was fully behind this action and that he would be with them in spirit. His thoughts and prayers fully stood behind them in excommunicating this individual.

Now notice the threefold gathering. The church is gathered together. Paul is gathered with them in spirit and third, they are gathered together with the power of *our Lord Jesus Christ*. This presence of divine power in excommunication is the full support and approval of our Lord Himself. As a matter of a fact, the Lord is grieved when such wrong is tolerated.

c. Where

The *where* in our text does not deal with where the believers are to be when excommunication takes place. No doubt they would be gathered in church if they had one or in a home, if that is where they were meeting for worship. The *where* has to do with where to deliver the sinning believer. The text says he is to be delivered, "...to Satan..."

Our question of course is: What does it mean to deliver someone to Satan? Well, what realm belongs to Satan? 1 John 5:19 tells us that the whole world lies in the hands or under the sway of the wicked one. All of the world belongs to Satan at this point. I am not talking about the earth. The earth is the Lord's. The difference between the earth and the world are that the world is the mass of unsaved mankind.

When a person becomes a Christian, he or she is taken out of Satan's domain and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). Satan has access to the believer's body to inflict sickness or death only as God allows. He cannot go beyond God's

permission (Job 1:6-12). If God had allowed him to take Job's life, he would have at a moment's notice. God did not allow it. Job did not belong to Satan's realm.

There are several reasons why God may allow Satan to inflict pain or physical problems on the believer's body. It may be for the glory of God (John 11:4), or it may be in order that God can do a deeper work in that person, as in the case of Job. It may also be because a person takes communion when there are certain sins in the life a believer (1 Cor. 11:27-30). God may also permit Satan at the believer's body when a believer is excommunicated. 1 Corinthians 5:5 says excommunication is for the destruction of the flesh. We will look at the meaning of that in another point.

When the believer is taken out of Satan's domain and translated into the kingdom of God's Son, there is a new protection for that person. The prayers and support of fellow believers are a great benefit in salvation.

Satan would like nothing better than to have access to your soul. But he may not, unless you sell yourself to him by sin. Satan likes second best, to have access to your body. He loves to inflict pain. There is nothing too drastic for him. And when he is given permission, he relishes in causing sickness or even death. He is demonic. He is a hater of life. He hates the Lord. He hates you. And if he can he will have you.

Now comes a natural question: If Satan hates God and the believer belongs to God and the church, why would the Lord instruct to hand such a person to Satan? Well, our text is careful to answer that question.

CONCL: Well, let's briefly review. A serious sin has been committed in the Corinthian church. What is the church to do? First, they should be grieved that such sin has taken

place in their fellowship. Now they are instructed to call a meeting and after they have gathered, they are to hand this person over to Satan in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose for such action we will see in our next message.