

DEALING WITH SIN IN THE CHURCH
August 20, 2000

INTRO: We have been considering the topic of dealing with sin in the church. At present we are working our way through the matter of dealing with sin in individuals. We are looking at two areas of problems: serious sins and sins not quite so serious. In the area of serious sins we have been considering 1 Corinthians 5, where a man took his step mother to wife. Such a person, we were instructed in this passage was to be dealt with immediately. The passage tells us who is to deal with it and it was the Corinthian church, that is the members of this body of believers. They were instructed on what to do. They were to deliver this person to Satan. This action was to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, indicating the authority behind the action and the approval of that authority. Furthermore, this action was to be taken in a meeting of the church. At this time they were to hand this person over to Satan.

Now we ended our last message with this question: If Satan hates God and a Christian belongs to God, not Satan, why would God instruct to deliver this person back to Satan? And so in your outlines you will come to the point titled: Why?

d. Why

1) Re: the flesh

We find the first reason in verse 5. It is, "...for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Let's consider first the words, "...for the destruction of the flesh..." The word rendered *destruction* is the word *holethron*. The idea is that of death for religious reasons (BAG).

I must insert here that excommunication ought always to be redemptive in nature. The desire is to bring about repentance. Let me move ahead here to 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (read). Let me seek to reconstruct the original situation. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 5 so that the church at Corinth would deal with the sinning man. What appears to have happened is that the church took Paul's instruction seriously. They

excommunicated this man. This disciplined person then apparently repented but the church would not forgive him. They apparently had not understood the redemptive purpose of church discipline. Now they would not receive this person back. Paul says, "This punishment (or better, censure or rebuke), which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man..." Paul then instructs, and we understand that this is after repentance, that forgiveness is to be extended and he is to be accepted back into fellowship.

The phrase then, "...for the destruction of the flesh..." is the ultimate possibility of excommunication if repentance does not occur. It is not that that death must occur, as the Corinthians apparently misstakenly understood. At the moment of repentance, the primary aim of the action has been achieved.

Now I would like to express my own personal view here regarding an otherwise difficult verse. It is found in 1 John 5:16. John has been giving instruction in prayer. Then he says, "If any man sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He (the Lord) will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death."

It is my personal understanding that the sin leading to death is a sin of such a nature as calls for excommunication. And thus, I think that handing over to Satan may include not praying for such a person. Notice however, that John does not instruct not to pray about it, but as an apostle he says, "I do not say he should pray about that."

There is a certain man on my prayer list. He has been for years

because of my relationship to him. But every time I come to his name I just ask the Lord to do whatever is necessary to turn him around. This person became a Christian. I led him to the Lord myself. Every evidence of conversion was there. Today he lives in deep sin. His life situation calls for excommunication but he does not belong to any particular church. When I come to his name on my prayer list I do not know what to pray and 1 John 5:16 comes to mind.

2) Re: the spirit

There is a second aspect to the words, "...for the destruction of the flesh..." It gives us the second reason why a believer living in gross sin is to be handed over to Satan. It is, "...that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus..." Now the implication of this clause is inescapable. Such a person's spirit, if not handed over to Satan, will otherwise by all odds be lost in the day of the Lord Jesus.

I will ask and seek to answer three questions: First, what is the day of the Lord Jesus? The day of the Lord Jesus is hard to determine, but I think it must refer to the day He returns for His own, the Church. In this day, the saved who have died will be raised first and ascend to meet the Lord in the air. Then those who are alive and remain go to meet the Lord at the same meeting place (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The second question is, why does Paul say, "...that the spirit may be saved..." rather than, "...that the soul may be saved..."? I confess, I do not know. But I believe it may be because when we become Christians, it is in the

spirit that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. If the spirit is lost, it is because the Holy Spirit has left and if the Holy Spirit leaves, ultimately; body, soul and spirit will be cast into hell fire.

The third question is, what possible answers may be given to the implication that the spirit may be lost in the day of the Lord Jesus? Probably the most acceptable view is that this person is to be handed over to Satan so that Satan can inflict physical pain or sickness, even to death in order to bring this person to repentance. If repentance is gained through this avenue, the spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. If excommunication does not take place, repentance likely will not and then the consequence of such a life-style is eternal hell fire or in other words the spirit is lost.

In our last message we asked, "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?" Here is our answer. It is the only hope of saving this individual from eternal hell fire.

3) Re: the church

In verses 6-8 the third reason for excommunicating such a person is given. If a person living in such sins is not dealt with then his sin will contaminate others and thus sin spreads in the church like leaven.

It is one thing to lose one person back to Satan and this may happen even if a person is excommunicated. It is another thing to allow that person's sin to contaminate others and in the process lose others as well.

It is no news to us that one bad apple can spoil the whole box of apples. It is also no news to us that to stop that kind of chain reaction one has simply to remove the bad apple. But somehow, when it comes to church relationships we cannot see the principle quite as clearly.

4) The Prescription

What prescription then, does the Scripture give in dealing with sin in the church if it is serious wrongdoing? We have five descriptive phrases or clauses in our passage that deal with the Biblical prescription for serious sins. First, according to 1 Corinthians 5:5 such a person is to be delivered to Satan.

This action is given twice in the active sense. In 5:13 Paul says, "Put away from yourselves that wicked person." Both 5:5 and 5:13 describe this action in the active sense. But 5:2 is rather ominous in that it is passive. It says, "You have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you." If the Corinthians are to put this person away by delivering him to Satan (active sense), who comes to take him away (passive sense)?

Years ago an interesting little translation matter was pointed out to me in Luke 12:16-21 from the Greek Testament. The words, "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you" would more accurately be translated, "You fool, this night THEY shall require your soul of you." Since the Lord is speaking and the third person plural pronoun is used, it seems the time has come when Satan's horde has gained access to this man's life. When Lazarus died in the story of the rich man, Scripture says God's angels came to carry him home. However, when the unsaved die, they, the demons, come to take that person. It seems to me that when the church delivers a person to Satan, Satan comes to take the rights given him over this person's body, and he will go to

whatever length God allows. What God allows, depends on the responsiveness of the one disciplined.

The second clause that speaks of the prescription instructs the Corinthian church to purge out this person (1 Cor. 5:7). The Greek word is *ekkathairo* and means to cleanse or clean out. The uncleanness of this person is likened to leaven and we all know that leaven or yeast permeates through the whole lump of dough.

The third clause that gives us the prescription is found in verse 11 and it is that the rest of the believers are not to keep company with such a person. We hardly need to expand or do we? When a box of good tomatoes or any other fruit or vegetable keep company with one that is spoiling the consequences are so obvious it hardly needs explanation.

The fourth clause, and closely related to the third, instructs us to not eat with such a person (11). There is a growing misunderstanding resulting from our misunderstanding of the meaning of love regarding the meaning of this clause. The growing misunderstanding is that the instruction not to eat with a person who has been excommunicated is that it means not to have communion at the Lord's table with such a person. The argument is that the context is communion.

However, there is a similar strain in each passage regarding dealing with sin in the church. When dealing with wrong in the interpersonal realm, the excommunicated person was to be treated as a heathen and a tax collector. When dealing with wrong in the instructional realm, the person was to be rejected. When dealing with serious sin in the individual's life that person was not to be companied with. The common denominator in all three cases is that normal relationships with such a person should cease to exist until restoration occurs.

In 1 Corinthians 5:11 we find that church members are not to company with a person

who has been excommunicated for serious sin. The word here is *sunanamignusthai*. For the Greek language, that is a long word but it simply means not to mingle or mix with. At the close of verse 11 the meaning of this is given in greater detail. Paul writes, "...not even to eat with such a person." I have been amazed at the number of Christians I have talked to about this who argue that this does not mean that we are not to eat with such a person. It means, they argue, to not have communion with such a person.

In light of each instance of excommunication and the prescription given in each case, I believe there is no other view possible than that it means to not eat with such a person at all. One of the most pleasant ways of companying with other people is eating together. But such companying is to come to an end with a person who is excommunicated.

The fifth clause has to do with judging the person (v. 12). In order to use the prescription judgement has to be made. This judgement has to do with those who are inside, or Christians. We have fully explained the necessity of judgement in an earlier message.

The last clause is found at the close of verse 13. It is this, "Put this wicked person away from yourselves."

CONCL: In conclusion then this morning, "Why is a person who lives in gross immorality to be delivered to Satan when he or she rightly belongs to God?" The ultimate reason for giving such a person over to Satan is that this person left in his sin will be ultimately lost. The only hope of sparing this person is excommunication.

We saw that God's prescription to dealing with a case like this is to judge this person, hand him over to Satan and then refuse him or her Christian fellowship.

Let me say one more time that the purpose of such action must always be redemptive in nature. The purpose is to draw this person back if possible. I would also like to add that when a person repents he or she is to be restored to full Christian fellowship. It seems that the Corinthians misunderstood Paul. They carried through and banned this person from their fellowship. But when he repented, and

apparently he did (2 Cor. 2:1-11), they would not reinstate him. It seems they understood that once they banned such a person it was until physical death took place. So Paul heard about this and wrote back instructing them to receive this person by forgiving him, comforting him and loving him (Read 2 Cor. 2:6-11).