

10. Learning to Deal with Sin in the Church

In our last topic, we saw what it means to be a spiritual parent. We saw that in order to be a spiritual parent, we must have a spirit of patience and humility if we want to be effective in helping our physical and spiritual children to experience healthy growth. We will help them grow to spiritual maturity if we lead them with love and example. In cases where we have to discipline, we will discipline with love. In our topic today, we are going to see how to deal with sin in the church with a spirit of love. Only as we learn to discipline in love will that discipline be effective.

We have seen in the first chapters of 1 Corinthians that the church in Corinth had many problems because many of the Christians were carnal and were living their lives like the people of the world. In fact, 1 Corinthians 5:9 points out the fact that Paul had written an earlier letter about how to deal with sin in the church. 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 says, “It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles--that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.” Here, we see that there was immorality in the church at Corinth. The kind of immorality that was being allowed in the church at Corinth was considered so wrong that it was even illegal under Roman law.

Here, we see that a man was having sexual relationships with his father’s wife. Even if this was the man’s stepmother and not his own mother, this was still considered incest even under the Roman law. In addition to the sin of the man, we also see that it was causing other Christians to become puffed up or proud. This indicates that many of the other Christians knew the kind of sin that this man was committing. Since this was common knowledge in the church, the idols worshipers in the surrounding area probably also knew what was happening and were talking about the evilness of this sin. In contrast, the church had not even mourned or shown any sorrow that such a sin was being committed and the church was puffed up about it instead.

As a result of their pride, the church had taken no action to remove this man from their fellowship. Matthew 18:15-17 says, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” This man was sinning against the whole church and the church was doing nothing. As a result, the church had become puffed up instead of mourning about the sin and taking action to either restore or remove the man from the fellowship of the church, even though Paul had previously written to the church.

Paul had written earlier to the Galatians in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Paul had pointed out to the Galatians that if a person was caught in the very act of sin the first thing a church was to do was to seek to restore that person. This was to be done by Christians that were spiritual and not carnal because the first goal of a church should always be to restore. It was to be done by spiritual Christians so that they would seek to restore in a spirit of

gentleness. Paul realized that an attitude of pride would cause those who were trying to restore to commit sin themselves. Since Paul had already previously written to the church in Corinth, he had probably shared some of the same principles that he had shared with the Galatians.

As a result, Paul told the church that it was now past time for the church to take action. In case there was any possibility the church did not know how to exercise discipline, Paul explained to the church exactly what to do to deal with their own pride and also remove this man from the fellowship of the church. 1 Corinthians 5:3-5 says, “For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our 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.” Paul said that he was present in spirit even though he was not physically present. We also want to help our children know how to help a whole church take action when action is needed.

Paul said that the church was to gather together to take action to remove the sinning brother from their fellowship. He said that they were to act in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and not in their own strength. He said that they were to deliver the guilty person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. In Job 1:9-10, we see that all true followers of the Lord have a hedge of protection from Satan around them. When a church takes action to deliver a person to Satan, that hedge of protection is removed. That allows Satan to do whatever he desires to the physical body of that person. 1 Corinthians 11:28-31 show that such discipline by the church allows Satan to bring weakness, physical sickness and even physical death to such a person.

However, the goal of the Lord for any Christian is always restoration, even when God allows Satan to destroy the physical body of a Christian. We see that even though Satan destroys the body the spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. The Lord will also stop Satan in his destruction of the flesh if there is repentance. This man did repent of his sin and the church was encouraged to restore him. 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 says, “This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him.” Once the man repented, Paul made it very clear that now the responsibility of the church was to forgive, to comfort and to reaffirm their love to the brother that had sinned. We also want to help our children learn to restore a brother that has sinned.

Next Paul began to deal with the pride that the other Christians had shown as they had talked about this brother that was living in open rebellion against the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, we read, “Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.” Here, Paul confronted the sin of the church when he said that their glorying was not good. He reminded them that a little leaven (yeast) will leaven the whole lump of dough. When a church does not deal with open sin in the church, that sin will spread to other Christians.

Paul also told the church how they were to deal with their own sin by reminding them that as Christians their glorying was not good as they talked about the man living in sin. Paul told them that they were to purge out the old leaven. In addition to delivering the rebellious person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, they were also to purge out the old leaven. This meant that they were to deal with the fact that, as a church, they were puffed up about what was happening in the church. As a church, they were to realize that they were truly unleavened.

In the Old Testament, the Jews removed all leaven from their houses for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since Christ is our Passover, He paid the penalty for our sins. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Christ became sin for us so that we could stand in the righteousness of Christ and not in our own sin. That is why it is important for us, our children and our church to realize the importance of daily cleansing from sin so that we are truly unleavened because of the daily cleansing of sin. This is also why we are to have a time of self-examination and confession at each communion service of the church.

We see that we are to show our children by our example how to do two key things. First, we are to remove the leaven of malice and wickedness. The word that is translated “malice” speaks of “*a desire to injure others or being wicked to the point of not being ashamed to break laws.*” Here, we see two key situations where it is important to discipline a sinning person: when a person desires to injure others (often through false gossip) or when a person chooses to live in open rebellion against the Lord and is unwilling to deal with their sin. The word that is translated “wickedness” speaks of having evil purposes or desires. In Acts 3:26, we read, “To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.” In this verse, the word is translated “iniquities” and points out that the Father sent Christ to turn every one of us from our evil purposes and desires.

Second, we are to eat the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. The bread of sincerity speaks of purity of lives. This reminds us that our desire should be to live a continual life of purity before the Lord. We are also to conduct our lives according to the truth of the Word of God. As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to deal with sin in the church, we want to show our children how to live lives that are an example for others to follow by living lives of purity before the Lord and walking according to the truth of the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to live a pure life and walk according to the truth of the Word of God.