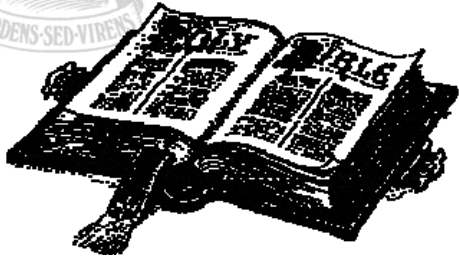




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No 3, (part 1). The all too common response of the Christian

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and

have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you," 1 Cor 5:1-2.

Last week we looked at what the Christian's response to sin in the Church should be. Sadly, that is all too often not the response that is forthcoming from the people of God. The attitude of the people in Corinth is more akin to the general attitude today of Christians to sin than that of an Ezra or a Jeremiah, whose reactions to sin amongst God's people we noted last week.

I wish to examine the all too common reaction to sin amongst us.

It is important to note this in order to understand the present powerlessness that is in the church.

The world and its wickedness is often blamed for the spirit of apathy that pervades society regarding the things of God. It is this spirit which renders so much of the outreach work in which Christians engage very ineffective. This is the common Christian explanation for the state of things today.

But that form of reasoning does not stand up when we consider the time, the place and the prevailing atmosphere in which the message of this New Testament age was launched! The Saviour commanded the apostles that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," Luke 24:47. There was not a more inhospitable place on the face of the earth for the gospel to be preached as that city in which the Son of God had been rejected and cruelly crucified just a few short weeks before. Yet that is where the apostles first raised the standard of Christ. Within weeks of the day of Pentecost, tens of thousands of converts were singing the praises of Christ and proclaiming Him as Redeemer in that sinful city.

It is not the world's attitude that hinders the gospel today but our lack of power, and that because of the believer's wrong attitude to sin in the church. It is the duty of the man of God to bring home to his people this truth. He must show sin for what it is. Particular and pointed preaching is rare today.

The attitude of the Corinthians to the sin that was in their church was wrong.

I. IT WAS THE RESPONSE OF PRIDE

"Ye are puffed up." This is a term that Paul uses six times of the Corinthians believers. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4.

1. The Corinthians treated the sin as a natural thing. "Natural sequence" is the primary meaning of "puffed up". The believers in Corinth did not treat this wickedness as they



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should have but looked upon it as something natural and acceptable. The idea behind this word is, I think, that just as a bellows, when pumped, naturally produces a blast of air, so the proud response of the Corinthians was a natural product of their sinful natures. They embraced this fornication as acceptable behaviour.

Thus it is that that which is alien becomes accepted. In Numbers 25:6 and Ezra 9:2 we have examples of this. "And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who *were weeping before* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." No sense of wrong-doing or shame was manifested by this wicked prince. He considered it a natural thing that he was doing.

The same was true of the people in Ezra's Day. "For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." Forbidden marriages were acceptable to the people. They did not count them strange. The actions of Phineas and Ezra indicate just how unnatural such actions were. In 2 Kings 22:11, 19 there is another example. "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes . . . Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard *thee*, saith the LORD." Josiah's reaction contrasts most markedly with that of his servants who brought him the book of the law. He was horrified to hear what the law had to say to his people in the light of their sinfulness and saw that great wrath was about to break upon their heads. For this reason he humbled himself and wept before the Lord. His servants, on the other hand, seemed to treat the whole matter in a most nonchalant way!

2. The Corinthians gloried in their spiritual state. "Your glorying *is* not good," verse 6. Even with this sin in their midst, they gloried in their spirituality. They were blind to their corruptions and defilements. They felt themselves to abide on an elevated spiritual plane. How common this is! "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," Revelation 3:17. The church at Laodicea had a proud view of itself. Is there not pride abroad amongst God's people on the issue of sin? Yes there is. There are many who pride themselves that they are so liberated that their womenfolk do not wear hats to God's house; that they do not strictly observe the Lord's Day; that they feel themselves free to drink alcohol socially; that they see no wrong in going to the cinema; that they listen to so-called "gospel" rock music. Such attitudes are born out of pride. When modesty and worldliness of dress and appearance, when the paint and the putty of Hollywood become fashionable in the church then pride has taken over. Such feelings of superiority are manifested on an all too common basis today.

3. The attitude of The Corinthians contrasted greatly with that of Paul. When he heard of the matter he reacted very differently from the Corinthians. "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed . . . to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," verses 3-



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5. Paul, far away from Corinth, viewed the sin in the church as a heinous thing that should and must be judged. The culprit in Corinth should be discipline and put out of the church with the objective of preserving his soul in the Day of the Lord.

Here is where departure from Christ begins. The believers in Laodicea had proud views of themselves and as a result Christ was expelled from the church. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me," Revelation 3:20. It was pride that put Christ out of Laodicea.

It is sin and not the Saviour we should put out. This is the teaching of Christ on this issue. "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Matthew 18:17.

May the Lord awaken us to the wrong attitude to sin that has taken over our hearts and churches.

This is the first part of our third study in a short series of messages on "The problem of sin in the church". [Click here](#) to listen to/download a recording of each of the messages in the series.