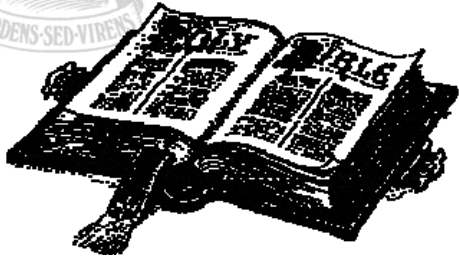




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“The problem of sin in the church”

No 3. (part 2) 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.

As we continue our examination of why the Corinthians treated the sin that had come into the church in the manner that they did, we build upon last week’s study where we saw that pride was the underlying cause. In their state of spiritual decline, they viewed the gross acts of immorality referred to in our text as something natural and acceptable. Today we continue with the consideration of two more points:

II. THE CHRISTIAN’S ATTITUDE TO SIN MAY SOMETIMES BE MORE WICKED THAN THE WORLD’S!

“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles,” verse 1. Corinth was a most wicked city, renowned for its paganism and resultant licentiousness. Yet even the depraved society of that city was shocked at the immorality found in the Corinthian church!

1. The world sometimes puts God’s people to shame. Ezekiel records the words of God in which He states that God’s professing people had fallen to a level of immorality below that of Sodom! “Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use *this* proverb against thee, saying, As *is* the mother, *so is* her daughter. Thou *art* thy mother’s daughter, that lotheth her husband and her children; and thou *art* the sister of thy sisters, which lothed their husbands and their children: your mother *was* an Hittite, and your father an Amorite. And thine elder sister *is* Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, *is* Sodom and her daughters. Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as *if that were* a very little *thing*, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw *good*. Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done,” Ezekiel 16:44-51. Jerusalem was more wicked than Sodom!



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This same theme is touched upon by the Saviour in “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee,” Matthew 11:21-24. Those privileged with the gospel had a reaction to it that was more wicked than that of Tyre and Sidon or of Sodom.

Backsliding is as the bursting of a dam. The flesh, released from the restraints of grace, rushes forth to reclaim the indulgences it has been denied and with a voracious appetite takes its fill.

2. Such defiance of God’s truth indicates the working of the spirit of apostasy. Such bold, proud defiance as that seen in Corinth speaks of antichrist. There was a glorying or boasting of themselves in this wretched state. Such were those that Paul warned the Colossians about. “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things,” Philippians 3:18-19. Such an attitude is clearly reminiscent of the devil, who glories in his rebellion, and his offspring, the Antichrist. Consider the words of Isaiah regarding the devil. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High,” Isaiah 14:12-14. A deliberate setting aside of God’s law and a living in defiance of it bespeaks the antichrist and that is what was happening in Corinth.

It must be said that it is likewise happening in many Christian assemblies. The teaching of God’s word is denied, denigrated and defied, and all in the name of “modern religion” and keeping up with the times. In truth, it is a yielding to the spirit of lawlessness which fills the air throughout the world today. In fashion, speech, appearance and behaviour there is a copying of the world, a yielding to its ‘spirit’ evident amongst many who profess the name of Christ.

3. Such an assembly is on the verge of disaster. “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” 1 Cor 5:6. The use of the analogy of leaven is widely understood amongst Christians as an illustrating of the pervasive actions of sin once it gains a foothold. Sin transforms, for the worst, all it comes in contact with. That was the danger that faced the church in Corinth.

“But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith



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of some," 2 Timothy 2:16-18. Paul changes the analogy from leaven to canker or gangrene here in his letter to Timothy, but the inference is the same. Gangrene is a disease which springs up when the blood supply drops to parts of the body, usually the feet, and causes the flesh to die. Death will follow if treatment is not administered. Oftentimes that means the cutting off of the infected limbs.

Sadly, there has not been a vigorous applying of the moral teachings of the Bible to the body of Christ today that there should be. Consequently, spiritual gangrene has set in. That must be dealt with effectively if disaster is to be avoided.

The cost of following false teaching and false views of just what is moral behaviour is spiritual death for those who do so, be it individual or congregation. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent," Revelation 2:5. The removal of the candlestick, the symbol of a church Rev 1:20, meant the removal of the light and blessing of God from their midst. It is similar to what happened to Samson when the Lord left him and removed his strength, Judges 16:20.

Corinth was not a very old church. When Paul wrote his epistle it was likely only a few years in existence. Yet even to a church so new and fresh there was the danger of being cut off.

III. SUCH AN ATTITUDE MAY BE FOUND WHERE LEAST EXPECTED

The church at Corinth had a noble history.

1. It was born amidst trial. "And he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus was Christ*. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his raiment*, and said unto them, Your blood *be upon your own heads*; I *am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain *man's house*, named Justus, *one* that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This *fellow* persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open *his mouth*, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and *of your law*, look ye *to it*; for I will be no judge of such *matters*. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things," Acts 18:4-7, 12-17.

Such experiences should have bound the converts to Christ but how quickly they drifted into sin! Memorable conversion experiences are no defence against the inroads of sin.

2. It was supported by divine encouragement. "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city," Acts 18:9-10.



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Such a declaration of divine favour and encouragement would have been shared by Paul with every convert, yet from such favour they quickly turned. The human heart is ever so fickle!

3. It was established amidst privileges. The church was commenced by the great apostle Paul. He had noble associates in the work. "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers . . . And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus was Christ,*" Acts 18: 1-3, 5.

Paul, in his epistle, speaks of the message under which they had been converted. "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God," 1 Corinthians 1: 17-18. From such glorious truths they turned to and tolerated the filthiness of the flesh.

4. It was infused with much grace. "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 1: 4-7. That was their recent past. How different their present state! " . . . *there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles . . . "

How are the mighty fallen!

5. It was delivered from great sin. Corinth was a city under the influence of darkest heathendom. The sins out of which many of them had been delivered showed that clearly. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11. From such a gracious deliverance they turned back to the vomit of heathendom's immorality.

This church, but a few years old, is in grave danger of apostasy through its tolerance of sin.

May we all take solemn heed to these truths in this evil age.

This is the second 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.