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IT DOES NOT TAKE MUCH TO WORK RUIN!!

The danger of tolerating sin in the Church

(An article based upon sermons preached by Rev Ivan Foster in September 1995. Click to listen to **Part 1**, and **Part 2**.)

"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" 1 Corinthians 5:6.

Man by nature is insensitive to sin but the Lord is not! Man will see little cause for concern about that which deeply grieves and angers the Lord. Those who seek to share the Lord's view of sin will often be seen as those who make "mountains out of molehills". Their concerns are deemed an unnecessary disturbance of the peace of the Church.

This sad truth is illustrated by the incident recorded in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul did not share the deplorable view to which we have referred. He was determined to disturb the sinful tranquillity of the Church at Corinth.

Sin had been admitted into the church and it was sin of a most wicked kind. Paul says of it: ". . . such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife," verse 1.

The gap that existed between the Lord and the believers in Corinth is exemplified in two words in the original Greek - "puffed up" and "mourned". What a world of difference there is between these two words. The people were full of pride when they should have been broken-hearted and lamenting over their backsliding. They honoured this wicked person rather than having him removed. "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you," verse 2. They exonerated this man's sin rather than excommunicating him!

How divergent may be the views of the Lord and His professing people!

It is the church's duty to discipline sin. Paul is seeking to exercise his authority and get to grips with the sins at Corinth for there are many.

I. WHAT A SIN THIS WAS.

1. It was the common talk of the city. The whole city was filled with the scandal of this wickedness. Is it not deplorable that the Church of God at Corinth could not see that which scandalised the heathen?

2. It was a sin worse than that which the pagans would tolerate. ". . . and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles," verse 3.

3. God's people may sink lower than the wicked. Abraham was rebuked by Pharaoh for his deception and willingness to jeopardise his wife's honour. "And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had," Genesis 12:18-20. Some time later, Abraham repeated this awful sin and deception. He was rebuked by Abimelech for his deceit about Sarah. "And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not



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to touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake," Genesis 20:1-11.

When the scandalous are scandalised by the actions of believers then how great is that sin.

II. THE SAD COLLUSION OF THE CHURCH IN THIS MATTER

It is to be noted that Paul deals with the sin of the church in not disciplining this offender before he deals with the sin itself. "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?" 1 Corinthians 5:12.

1. That which scandalised the heathen was treated with indifference by the church. This matter was not mentioned in the letter sent to Paul. "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me . . ." 1 Corinthians 7:1. This did not feature amongst their concerns. What a dreadful indictment of their hearts!

2. Their pride produced this shameful attitude. Verse 2. Being puffed up they had a high opinion of themselves, "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another," 4:6, and a low opinion of Paul, "Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power," 4:18-19. This state of heart produced a tolerance of sin. While they argued about the merits of different ministers, they ignored the wickedness in their midst.

Pride unbalances our moral judgment.

3. They ought to have mourned. The word means "a loud wailing." See Rev 18:19.

As a family mourning a death they should have united in grief over this matter. But instead they said nothing about the sin when they wrote to Paul, not being concerned about it as they ought.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ATTITUDE

They endangered the whole fabric of the Church in Corinth. The malignant nature of sin is seen here. Everything it touches is changed for the worst.

1. Their tolerance permitted that corruption to spread. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" 5:6. Sin must be fought most relentlessly, no matter who pleads for it to be spared and conquered, for the wellbeing of the body of Christ, the church. The spreading of the corruption of sin is unseen and secret. It worked like leaven. Sin in the camp can secretly work the greatest of havoc as was the case with Achan's sin, Joshua 7.

2. Their tolerance of sin was a denial of their Christian profession. Since Christ is our Passover Lamb we should, like the Israelites of old, put away all that corrupts. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," 5:7, 8.

3. Such tolerance of sin is contrary to the distinctions that must ever exist between the church and the world. "I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee," Hosea 11:9.



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The Holy One dwells amongst us and is greatly offended by our tolerance of sin.

IV. THE COURSE OF ACTION REQUIRED.

1. Judgment of sin should have taken place. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?" 5:11-12.

The matter should have been acted upon.

2. A purging of the church, verse 7. The offender should have been put out of the fellowship. "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person," 5:13. It was an action to which the whole church must agree, 5:4. They must act in unison and unitedly stand against this wickedness.

3. The offender must be handed over to Satan. "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," 5:5. By a judicial act, the church places the offender outside its pale where he is at the mercy of the devil. This the place from which he was taken. "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me," Acts 26:18. He is returning to that dominion. He becomes as a slave of the devil again. "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.

To be given up to our sins and to the devil is a dreadful punishment. "So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels," Psalm 81:12, Rom 1:24, 26.

4. Such an act was for the breaking of the flesh and the preserving of the soul of the offender. "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," verse 5.

Discipline is the greatest kindness the church can perform for the rebellious believer.