

Go To Your Brother

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It is often said that Christians are not called to be sinless, but rather we are called to sin less. Herein is expressed the idea, not that we are given licence to sin, but rather that perfection has only ever been attained by one -- Jesus Christ. God understands that we may mess up from time to time, this is why we are promised that *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). If there were not ongoing mistakes, then there would be no ongoing need for cleansing.

That being said, the New Testament is also very clear in teaching that we must not tolerate unrepentant sin to remain in the Lord's Body. Paul sets the example here, even in dealing with the faults of the apostle Peter, *“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed”* (Galatians 2:11). Peter's sin was apparently rather public, and in addressing that sin, Paul was able to help correct the problems that it had created. Another situation which Paul had to face was with Alexander the coppersmith, who was apparently contradicting Paul's inspired

teaching! Obviously, such a thing could not be allowed to go unchecked. Paul did what he could, and then warned others, like the young evangelist Timothy. *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works”* (2 Timothy 4:12).

There are times when the sin of a Christian seems flagrant, or is publicly known. How should we respond in such situations? Should all public sin elicit a public response such as that which Paul gave in these inspired accounts? If not, why not, and how should we respond?

One important fact which should be noted in considering the actions of Paul in these instances as a pattern for dealing with sins of a public nature, is that we may not have all of the information. We can correctly conclude from Paul's writing that these sins were indeed public, and that they were finally addressed in a very public manner. However, all of the surrounding circumstances, and any actions that may have been taken before the public rebuke were not shared with us; because those facts were not pertinent to the message of the inspired penman. What else should we consider in dealing with sin within the Church?

In approaching any one subject, it is important to consider all that the Scriptures have to say regarding the matter. In facing this particular

issue, it would seem that we tend to run to one extreme or the other, much like the first century Christians in Corinth did.

When Paul first wrote to them, they were not only ignoring sin in the Church, they were embracing it as a way to relate to those in the world around them! Paul admonished them, *“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened”* (1 Corinthians 5:6,7).

At his second writing, the brethren at Corinth had grown so zealous in reproving sin that it had become a problem:

“Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. (2 Corinthians 2:6,7).

So, it would seem that there is a middle ground: a place where we reprove sin, but still show love and compassion to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Fortunately, our Lord Himself gave us direct teachings as well as principles to guide us in these situations. In Matthew 18:15-17, we find

the process which should always be followed in addressing the sin of another.

As we consider this process let us remember the context in which the discussion occurs. In the preceding verses, our Lord has just told a parable of a shepherd, who having 100 sheep, lost one, and went out seeking the one. Jesus makes application in verse fourteen, saying, *“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”*

In verse fifteen, He then instructs us that when dealing with sin, to first go to the individual in private. Though our Lord needs no support here, Solomon’s wisdom explains: *“Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another. Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away”* (Proverbs 25:9,10).

Jesus goes on in verses sixteen and seventeen to tell us, that if necessary, we should then go with two others, and finally, if need be make a public rebuke. as a last resort.

When we become aware of the sins of others, how often do we follow our Lord’s command? Do we simply gossip to others about what they are doing? Do we air the Church’s dirty laundry for all the world to see? Or do we, in simple loving

obedience, act according to the wisdom and commands of our savior?

The final guiding principle that our Lord gives to us is short, yet powerful: *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”* (Matthew 7:12). Place yourself in their shoes. Wouldn’t you want them to show enough concern for your soul to talk to you? How would you want them to do it?

By following the New Testament pattern in confronting sin souls can be saved, love shown, and God will be glorified! *“Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins”* (James 5:20).

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