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CHURCH RESTORATION

Part 1

Proverbs 6:16-19: There Are Six Things That The Lord Hates



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In New Testament times the most significant leaders in local churches were elders; men who displayed reliability and certain spiritual qualities. Elders were entitled to respect (I Timothy 5:1, 19). Christians were to heed their teaching and follow it. As in today, first-century Christians sometimes entertained critical feelings towards their elders. They were not to rebuke elders but at the same time they were free to speak openly with them about their failings, provided they did so in a proper manner (I Timothy 5:1; Matthew 18:15-17). Elders can and do make mistakes and we should humbly submit ourselves one to another in the true spirit of reconciliation. The ultimate goal of restoration is to restore the relationship that has been alienated, separated, and damaged because of sin. Note: If a person after an attempt at reconciliation says, "I have forgiven him but I cannot work with him," then we must recognize that reconciliation undisputedly has not taken place, but instead there is still alienation brought on by sin, which encompasses a spirit of deception, pride, bitterness and dishonesty.

Let us suppose an elder had committed, or was thought to have committed an offense, (we must remember that leaders are not only more vulnerable to temptation, but also more exposed to

accusations both true and false.) The elder could then be accused, but the accusation was to be made in the presence of witnesses (I Timothy 5:19). In this way the elder would be protected against irresponsible charges and accusations and against subsequent inaccurate gossip.

Within the Christian community, gossip is the most damaging offense to leadership. If the leader does not yield to temptation, the likelihood is high that his or her ministry will become less effective or brought down by gossip. Gossip thrives on rumor and half-truths, and is in itself a great evil. The presence of gossip within a local church is a sign of the absence of proper church discipline. Nothing so poisons fellowship as gossip, alienating brother against brother and God. The beauty of Christ's instructions in Matthew 18:15-22 is that it avoids gossip and slander. Nothing can be said against you unless a person is willing to say it to your face where the real truth can be presented.

Brethren, in regards to reconciliation, we must counsel a person properly, with knowledge and discernment according to the Word so that the relationship is sincerely restored with God and his brother. If we fail to do this, then we have failed in our

responsibilities toward God, the church and our brother and Isaiah 59:1-4 comes to pass. The person continues in his alienation and separation with his brother, thus the sinner in turn grows harder in his heart and his ability of deceiving himself and others increases. The dishonesty and deception which sin breeds is infinitely more destructive and difficult to deal with than the initial sin itself. Indeed the battle is for honest and openness of heart.

Brethren, we fail miserably in our understanding, knowledge, and obedience in corrective church discipline and restoration. It is because of this that true reconciliation does not take place and instead alienation continues, gossip rules, and sin rampant in the church. The church bends over backward in the attempt to avoid conflict so that we opt for peace-at-any-price, forgetting that reconciliation has a cost. Sin, if there is sin, must be dealt with. Godly restoration of fellowship is based always and only on cancelled sin. If a person refuses to renew his fellowship, then true reconciliation has not taken place, and pseudo-reconciliation predominates.

One reason for our lack of ability to deal with sin in others is because we have become so insensitive to sin. We have become selective about sins that

Scripture specifically mentions. We hold in contempt those Christians who commit adultery, homosexuality, murder etc., but we cheerfully ignore sins like pride, gossip, lying deception, unforgiveness etc.

“There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Sexual sin does not appear on the list. Pride and lying, gossip and slander come first. The reason why God judged Ananias and Sapphira was because of sin. The sin was not over the withholding of money, but rather they were alienated/separated from God and the apostles because of lying and deceit caused by pride. Brethren, we do not take seriously sins in the body that have already alienated people from God in heaven, and man on earth. Sins of unforgiveness, deception, lying, gossip, slander, etc., are sins that damn the soul if allowed to continue. Having godly preaching, teaching, conferences special emphasis weeks, revival meetings, prayer, and then leaving it up to the Holy Spirit is not enough. God instructs us individually, unitedly and corporately to get involved in corrective church discipline (Matthew 18:15-22).

Another reason why we do not correct our fallen brethren is because of fear. The modern quest is for unity within the church and the hatred towards all intolerance. The problem however, has been that we have failed to distinguish between a right intolerance of sin and a

wrong intolerance of spirit. Many factors have contributed to this fallacy. First, we have a mistaken notion that such public discipline betokens pride, animosity or priggishness. Secondly, we have a misinterpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares as prohibiting all attempts to separate the bad from the good in the visible church. In addition, in these days of mass media, we have fear concerning the outbreak of public scandal. Finally, there is a fear that Christ's God ordained method whereby the congregation may either experience cleansing of sin and restoration, or alienation, separation, healing and restoration through Matthew 18:15-22 (corrective church discipline) will be seen legally as discriminatory and as a violation of individual rights. That the church might be sued is no excuse to allow ourselves to be scared away from obeying God in being faithful to our God-given and ordered responsibilities to do our part in ministering to a brother through corrective church discipline, no matter what the political or financial cost might be. God expects us to pick up our cross to the death if necessary. Just as it was no excuse for the three Israelites to bow to Nebuchadnezzar by saying, “Let us use wisdom, we still love the Lord, let us bow instead of being thrown into the furnace,” so it is no excuse for us today.

Churches have always brought criticism down on their heads during the periods of their greatest faithfulness. Faith is obedience; without obedience/faith, one cannot please God. The church today is a church of disobedience, faithlessness, and is operating in fear. In light of this, God is going to allow the church to be chastised, tested and persecuted until the church grows in love (faith), and once again truly represents Jesus on earth. He does not

compromise! Jesus (church) will please God through obedience to the death. This is why the church will go through much tribulation in order to become the pure, holy, obedient and faithful bride of Christ.

Today's church calls compromise, disobedience, and faithlessness WISDOM. Today's church hides its cowardliness and lack of faith under the cloak of “let us use wisdom.” The church faces a moral crisis within her ranks. Her failure to take a strong stand against evil (even in her own midst), and her tendency to be more concerned about what is expedient than what is right, has robbed the church of biblical integrity and power.

Another verse the church likes to take out of context and misinterpret is “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” The devil is truly wise in the knowledge of scriptures and will use them against us if we are not alert and vigilant. We should be meditating on the Word day and night, “a workman that needeth not be ashamed.” In this manner we will be wiser (better prepared) than the devil, since Jesus is also with us and we will not expose ourselves to any unnecessary attacks and temptations by him. Also, the devil uses his knowledge to attempt to destroy us, but we have the ability to use our knowledge with the power of the Holy Spirit for good purposes and thus, overcome the evil one. The church likes to use this verse for an excuse to compromise out of fear instead of developing faith by spending time with the Lord. If Daniel took this view he would have closed his window to pray because it was “wiser.” The whole study of Scripture in totality rejects this cowardliness view of the backslidden modern church. Also the very next verses in this same text of

Matthew 10 talks about faithful Christians being arrested etc., and reassures them to not fear, but be faithful. Also the modern church likes to use this verse to be dishonest in business practices, when the whole message of the gospel is one of restoring a dishonest heart and life with one of honesty and complicity with the Word. The gospel also represents a lifestyle of purity, honesty and holiness, where we truly represent Christ. We are not to be as unethical businessmen who represent dishonesty and deception, and are therefore not Sons of God, but Satan, the father of all lies. There is a big difference between a wise Christian businessman who insures he is not cheated, but also treats others fairly, and a greedy dishonest, deceptive man who selfishly wants the best for himself regardless of how unfair it is to the other man, or regardless if he breaks the law of the land. Again, this goes against the Word in totality, which exhorts us throughout to love our neighbor as ourselves and to be reconciled to God and man through purity and honesty in spirit and in deed. We are to rejoice when men say all evil against us falsely; not when we deserve our reputation because of shady, dishonest and deceptive practices that both offend men and governments.

The Word tells us clearly throughout the entirety of Scripture that we are our brothers keeper, and we are to go talk with him if he sins against us, or if we have sinned against him, or if we see sin in his life.

Yet there is another verse that people like to quote, in confronting their brother. Again, they take it out of context and the holistic doctrine of the Word. *“Judge not, that you be not judged.”* Matthew 7:1. The meaning

here definitely agrees with the rest of the Word that indeed we are supposed to judge, but we are to do it correctly without gossip or speculation. Verse 2 of Matthew 7 states, *“for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”* I want to be judged correctly according to the Word, Matthew 18:15. I do not want to be a target of gossip, or speculated about in supposed “holy” circles. *“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment (John 7:24).”*

Jesus teaches us again on judgment in Matthew 7:1. But in the first case we are being told, “Don’t be critical of others. Don’t look down on them and feel you are better than they are. Again, we must do it in the correct spirit of reconciliation, truly wanting to restore the broken relationship as it were before, between God and fellow man, without any barriers of fellowship, work or play. If one makes a condition that I have forgiven him but I will not work with him, even though sincere repentance has taken place, then there is still alienation/sin and he is deceiving you and himself. Naturally if one party has not truly repented, then his sin has already alienated him from fellowship with God. His sin also keeps him from fellowship and working with his fellow man, whom he still holds bitterness against. God is telling us not to judge by appearances based on gossip and speculation but rather, to be discerning. Do not jump to hasty conclusions, and be careful to judge by strictly following the mode in the Word. As attitude and spirit that is in compliance with Scripture is critical to reach a correct judgment, both concerning whether sin exists in our brother and then dealing with it strictly according to the Word. It has to be

done solely to restore reconciliation between God and their fellow brother.

Sin is what separates men from God and their fellow brethren. Sin separates men from their wives and it separates children from their parents. Sin brings a reproach upon the innocent by the guilty who want their own way. Sin is a violation of peace and the root of sin is selfishness, which breeds rebellion. Rebellion was first led by Lucifer in heaven out of his own heart where pride took root and jealousy was the fruit. Lucifer led a conspiracy through gossip and slander against God because he wanted his own way and was envious of Jesus. The result was a division and split amongst the angels as Lucifer allowed his vanity to take root and he orchestrated a revolt driving a wedge between the angels who listened to him without rebuking him and God.

Today Satan is doing the same thing bringing division and separation amongst the brethren. Churches are constantly splitting as pastors, deacons, elders and laymen are not following Christ’s method of confronting one another. Instead they listen to the gossip of men who do not follow God’s methodology for restoration, confrontation and through their own pride conspire with the talebearers. Then instead of forcing people to confront one another with their differences they listen to their gossip and give them bad counsel. As Judas betrayed Jesus so the guilty betray the innocent today. We will continue Part 2 in our next Pastoral Letter.