

**Shayla:** What does the Lord mean to treat someone like a “pagan and tax collector”?

**Matthew 18:15-20 HCSB** "If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. (16) But if he won't listen, take one or two more with you, so that **by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established.** (17) If he pays no attention to them, tell the church. But if he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you. (18) I assure you: Whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven. (19) Again, I assure you: If two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. (20) For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them."

### **Midrash:**

It's important that we understand that the context is one of church discipline. We need to keep in mind that “judgment begins with God’s household”.<sup>1</sup> Cultural Christianity, with its unbalanced presentation of grace, implies that judgment has no place among God’s people. Apparently, they never read either of the following two passages:

- **Psalms 78:56-59 HCSB** But they rebelliously tested the Most High God, for they did not keep His decrees. (57) They treacherously turned away like their fathers; they became warped like a faulty bow. (58) They enraged Him with their high places and provoked His jealousy with their carved images. (59) God heard and became furious; He completely rejected Israel.
- **Ezekiel 16:38 HCSB** I will judge you the way adulteresses and those who shed blood are judged. Then I will bring about your bloodshed in wrath and jealousy.

What’s really interesting to me is that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us<sup>2</sup> but we are to treat those who claim the name of Christ and yet refuse to live by their King’s standards the same way the Jews treated pagans and tax collectors.

This perfectly matches the Apostle Paul’s teaching on the same issue:

- **1 Corinthians 5:9-13 HCSB** I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- (10) by no means referring to this world's immoral people, or to the greedy and swindlers, or to idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. (11) But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a reviler, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. (12) For what is it to me to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are inside? (13) But God judges outsiders.

### **Put away the evil person from among yourselves.**

What’s being referred to here is the concept of *Herem*; religious excommunication; social boycott; shunning. The church is absolutely authorized to conduct itself in such a manner.<sup>3</sup>

The spiritual leaders of the church who confront a sinning member are to do so with a spirit of humility and gentleness, and with the goal of restoration.<sup>4</sup> However, we must not hesitate to do each other this favor. God considers dealing with each other’s sin “sharing each other’s troubles and problems.” We must do what is right by each other, even if it is not always appreciated. We are not, however, ultimately responsible for “fixing” our brother or sister “for we are each responsible for our own conduct.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 4:17 cp Ezekiel 9:6

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 18:18-20

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 6:1

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 6:2-5

Paul was faithful in passing on the Master's message concerning church discipline. He put it into practice in the Corinthian church.<sup>6</sup> Abandoning the sinner to Satan is part of this procedure. It is not done by some magical incantation but by expelling him from the church (see v.13; also vv.2, 7, 11). To expel him was to put him out in the devil's territory, severed from any connection with God's people. Outside of the protecting influence of the church, Satan is to be allowed to bring affliction on the man, which will hopefully bring him to repentance.<sup>7</sup>

A person under discipline does not lose their salvation. Their spiritual kinship is assumed.

- 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 HCSB each one's work will become obvious, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work. 14 If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire.
- 1 Corinthians 5:5 HCSB turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord.

Those who, under the guise of extending "grace", would refrain from exercising appropriate discipline are themselves sinning. Discipline must occur in order to maintain the good health of the body.<sup>8</sup>

There are those who are eager to separate themselves from the perceived sin of the world, but will not judge other Christians. "Judge not..." they quote. However, upon becoming a Christian, the standard is not lowered but raised! We should be held even more accountable because of what we know!<sup>9</sup>

Consider Paul's admonition in Romans 16:

- Romans 16:17-18 HCSB Now I implore you, brothers, watch out for those who cause dissensions and pitfalls contrary to the doctrine you have learned. Avoid them; 18 for such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

The fact that these people have the ability to create divisions and are teaching or modeling wrong doctrine leads me to believe these people are teachers or at the very least have the ear of some people. The more influence a person has, the greater the need for good character; therefore, the more influence, the higher the standard.

The instructions are clear. Casting out of church fellowship entails the family of God shunning the disciplined one in the hopes that he or she will be ashamed of their behavior and repent.<sup>10</sup>

What are some sins for which an unrepentant Christian should be disciplined by shunning?

- Sexual sin, greed, idol worship, abusive behavior, drunkenness, swindling.<sup>11</sup>
- Causing division, teaching or modeling false doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

What about a church leader who sins? Paul instructed Timothy that a church leader--an elder--is "to be considered worthy of double honor," when he rules well. When an elder sins, however, this is a matter of great consequence. First, no accusation is to be received on the basis of just one uncorroborated witness. If a charge is substantiated by two or three

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:1-4

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:5-6

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 1 Peter 4:17; Luke 12:45-48; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:11

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

<sup>12</sup> Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11; 2 John 1:10-11

witnesses or corroborating evidence however, the congregation is to "rebuke [him] in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning."<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, leadership carries a higher burden, and the sins of an elder cause an even greater injury to the church. The public rebuke is necessary, for the elder sins against the entire congregation. As James warned, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."<sup>14</sup>

This procedure must be followed without any consideration of the person's rank, social status, or place.

- 1 Timothy 5:21 HCSB I solemnly charge you, before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism. To disregard this procedure, making allowances for sin, is to become equally guilty of sin.
- Ephesians 5:11-14 HCSB Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead, expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. 13 Everything exposed by the light is made clear, 14 for what makes everything clear is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and the Messiah will shine on you.
- 1 Timothy 5:22 HCSB Don't be too quick to lay hands on anyone, and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.
- 2 John 1:10-11 HCSB If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and don't say, "Welcome," to him; 11 for the one who says, "Welcome," to him shares in his evil works.

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Timothy 5:17-20

<sup>14</sup> James 3:1