



“Paul’s Remedy for a Troubled Church”

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Many troubled churches are profiled in the New Testament scriptures, and from them we can learn many valuable lessons about how to avoid similar situations. The first few chapters of **Revelation** describe the seven churches of Asia Minor and each congregation had its own problems. They were commanded by the apostle John to correct those problems, or else their name or their candlestick would be removed.

A troubled church is of concern to everyone. It may well be that the congregation in the city of Corinth was the most troubled of all. There were a number of problems that existed among the church members that probably had their origin in the city itself. We’re told by historians that Corinth was a very beautiful place, but also a very wicked place. There was an idolatrous temple there, and within it horrendous things were practiced; most of which, of course, were contrary to the teachings of God’s word. Many of the people in the city who were eventually converted by the gospel and became members of the Lord’s body had come out of an atmosphere that was heavy with idolatry as well as immoral conduct. Before long, we begin to see the influence of that conduct as it spills over into the church and into the lives of men and women who should’ve changed their conduct when they were baptized into Jesus Christ. In **I Corinthians 5**, we learn about a man, a member of the congregation, who was living with his stepmother. Not only that, but many in the congregation were obviously not bothered by it, but were rather justifying the situation that the man and his stepmother were in.

I Corinthians 5: 1-2 “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles--that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.”

The apostle Paul very plainly pointed out that that situation had to be corrected; that if the individual who was guilty of that sin was going to be saved, he would have to be withdrawn from, warned, and hopefully that would be enough to change his conduct. And that those who were going along with the

individual in his sin had to also change, and could no longer give him any comfort or justification for his actions, and were even commanded to refrain from associating with him.

I Corinthians 5:4-7,9,11 “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened...I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people...But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person. ”

Paul went so far as to say they were not to eat with him. These measures were in order for the man to see the seriousness of the condition of his life and therefore, change.

In the first few chapters of Paul's letter to the Corinthian congregation, we see that there was also the problem of division in the congregation.

I Corinthians 1:10-13 “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

Paul was quick to point out that division is a sin, and those who were lining up behind certain preachers and justifying their division were wrong. You can't do that; Christ is not divided, and neither should you be divided, but be united.

Later, in chapter six of this same letter, Paul addresses the fact that some of them were going to law against one another before pagan judges.

I Corinthians 6: 1-2, 5-6 “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?... I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!”

Paul let them know that this was unacceptable. Why would the people of God have to go out and hire a pagan judge to settle their problems? Surely there was a wise man among their number who could determine the matter fairly.

In chapter 11 of this letter, the apostle Paul dealt with abuses of the Lord's Supper; how that it was impossible for them to come together and eat the supper because of the atmosphere that existed there in that particular time.

I Corinthians 11:20-22 “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.”

He then begins to set in order the way the Lord's Supper is to be observed and how they were to conduct themselves in the assembly in order to do that.

I Corinthians 11:23-29 “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.”

Well, we could go on and on because this first letter to this group of people in Corinth pointed out sin after sin and problem after problem, and Paul told them that it all needed to be corrected. The question is this: what is the remedy? How do you turn things like that around?

It may well be that you have been associated with a congregation where problems exist that should not. Maybe things are being done that should not be done. You may be wondering *how are we going to resolve this and make things the way the Lord wants them to be?* Paul gives some instruction for that before closing his letter to them.

I Corinthians 16:13-14 “**Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.**” (verse 13 KJV)

I would submit to you that that is Paul's remedy for this troubled church. He was essentially saying that if they followed this outline and complied with what he had written, the problems that currently existed in that congregation would melt away. The division that was present would become absent. Let's notice in detail each of these short instructions given by Paul.

- I. **Watch ye.** To me, it is very evident that nobody was watching in Corinth. Nobody was standing guard over the church, against sin and evil. People were left to do whatever they chose to do, ending in all kinds of problems and disobedience.

In the Old Testament scriptures, the watchman was a very important person. They didn't have floodlights or radar in those days. They didn't have the modern means of anticipating problems like we do today. Cities were surrounded by protective walls in those days, to help keep them safe from any invading armies. However, you certainly did not want to be surprised by an invading army in the middle of the night. So, as the evening would draw on, the watchman would ascend the walls of the city and walk around those walls throughout

the night, trying to detect any movement that might imply danger or trouble. If there appeared to be someone lurking in the shadows about to attack the city, the cry was made and the warning was sounded so that those in charge could quickly come to meet the problem. If a city had no watchman, it really wasn't ready to detect OR overcome any potential problems.

I don't believe anyone was watching in Corinth. I don't believe anyone was concerned enough to realize how far the church had slipped, or how easy it was going to be for them to drift farther and farther away from the teachings of the apostles. So, Paul said *watch*. What did he mean by that? Obviously, he meant that people needed to be on guard; to recognize when false doctrine was being taught, when immoral and ungodly living was being practiced, to know what was happening, to rise to the occasion and do something about it. Someone to speak where the scriptures speak and to be silent where the scriptures are silent. To stand up for what is right and condemn what is wrong. *Be on guard and look around you. Make sure that the telltale signs of sin are not encroaching upon the kingdom of God.* That's what Paul was saying.

I believe that's true today. Many churches are in trouble today because no one watches; no one detects early on what is happening. Then before we realize it, sin begins to grow and by the time it is realized, it has grown so large and we've drifted so far that it seems almost impossible to get back to what the Bible actually says we need to be doing and living like we need to live.

Sometimes the watchman is criticized: *You're always against this or that. You don't ever like what we're doing* and so on, in an effort to try to justify what they're doing. That's exactly why the Bible talks about elders or overseers in the church. When Paul met with the overseers of the Ephesian congregation, he pointed out the responsibility that was theirs to guard the flock, and thereby watch for the false teacher or individual who was doing things that would result in the eventual loss of their souls.

Acts 20:28-31 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."

I believe we need watchmen in the church: men who are qualified not only to stand up and preach the truth, but also defy false doctrine and anything that is evil and sinful or would lead us into sin. How do churches drift into apostasy? How do we get so far away from what the Bible says and what we know to be right? The answer is simple: nobody is watching. Nobody is alert and aware of the fact that passages in the word of God are being violated. As a result, the church gradually drifts. What happened at Corinth didn't happen overnight; it was over a period of time, in increments, gradually.

Sometimes we're astounded and amazed when a major change takes place in a church. But oftentimes, that's not the way the devil enters in among us. More often, it starts with minor or small things. For instance, the Corinthians had corrupted the Lord's Supper. As we mentioned earlier, Paul addressed this problem at Corinth where they had mixed the Lord's Supper with some sort of love feast. Little by little, they had become comfortable with what was going on, and were not giving thought to the fact that they were no longer keeping the commandments of the Lord regarding the communion. They didn't even recognize that how they were eating the Lord's Supper had become wrong in God's sight.

If we don't have people who are watching today, the devil is going to overtake us. If we're not making sure that what we practice and what we preach is according to God's word, then we are going to drift.

- II. ***Stand fast in the faith.*** Once you get there, you stay there. Once you affirm what's right, you stick with it. Don't give it up, don't vacillate back and forth from day to day. If you study the scriptures, you know that there were people in New Testament times who did not stand fast. There are names mentioned in the word of God that indicate very clearly that they had drifted; some left the church and we don't read about them any further. Others became so weakened that they became of little value to the church, but rather unfortunately they were a distraction to the truth and the church.

If everyone who had ever obeyed the gospel was still in the church at the time of their death, we'd see a tremendous change in the church. Whatever congregation you call home today, I can guarantee that someone has left. Somebody grew weak and drifted away. Somebody started missing church services, started dabbling in sin to some degree. As a result, they did not stand fast in the faith. They moved away from the faith and are no longer a part of it as they once were.

You may know somebody like that; you may BE somebody like that. Maybe you've left the faith. Maybe you no longer live for the Lord because you didn't stand fast; you were not firmly dedicated to the cause of truth and right. I don't know exactly how it will be in the Day of Judgment but I do know this: there will be a vast number of people who at one time belonged to the Lord, but ceased to belong to Him. They ceased to remain firm and steadfast in the faith. That's sad. If you're not standing firm in the truth, get back in there. Don't stay away from the church. There are many parents who would give anything to see their kids back in the faith. If these problems are to be solved, we've got to stand firm in what's right.

The people in Corinth were influenced by the goings on of the city. That old pagan temple where immorality was practiced daily was a bad influence on them. Some of them justified that same kind of sin in their own lives. They probably lived around, worked with and associated with people who were involved in that every day. Many of them gradually began to move back into that same kind of lifestyle. Paul reminded them not to do that, but to *be firm and stand fast in the faith.*

- III. **Quit you like men.** This means *act like men. Behave like men.* A better way to put it would be to say *grow up! Don't act like a child.* We all know what happens when you take a toy from a little boy or girl—they throw a fit. They act like children because they ARE children. Paul says if the church in Corinth is going to be salvaged, they're going to have to act like men. Able to discern good and evil, able to stand up for what's right without getting mad, able to take rebuke without an attitude of *I'll just quit and I won't come back anymore!* No, Paul tells them to *act like men.*
- IV. **Be strong.** What makes one strong in Christ? I believe the same principle that makes one strong *physically* makes one strong *spiritually.* You become strong physically by exercising and eating a proper diet. By the same token, you become strong spiritually by doing the same things. How many times a week do you feast on the word of God? How often do you diligently study the scriptures? How many times do you practice what you read? If you don't, you're not going to stand fast in the faith and you're not going to grow. If you don't grow, you may regress and if you regress, you're going to drift farther and farther away.
- V. **Let all that you do be done with love.** It's amazing how easy it is to convince others to do what's right when you act out of a spirit of love instead of spite, anger or things of that nature. The division in the Corinthian church existed partly because of a lack of love and consideration for one another. Does that mean that you approve of sin? No. Does that mean you condone evil? No. Does that mean that you justify what other people are doing? No. it means that in the processing of dealing with that, you do it in the spirit of love. Do everything you can to win those people back to Christ, to strengthen them. It may be necessary for me to rebuke you, but I need to do it in the spirit of love. I may need to look you in the eye and tell you *you're wrong and you're going to be lost if you don't change,* but I do it in the spirit of love. I don't do it to spite you or to make you mad. I do it to save you. I do it because I love you.

I really think this congregation at Corinth was bordering on collapse in many ways. Paul was merely saying to them, *you've got to stand up for what's right, but you've got to do it in the right spirit. You've got to be strong; you can't cave in to the influences of Satan. You can't give up to the surrounding cry of those who are idolatrous and ungodly.*

Can the church at Corinth be saved? Of course it could. Can a congregation today be saved? Of course it can. It all depends on whether or not we are willing to follow the divine instructions that are given in the word of God. If we are willing to do that, churches that are weak can become strong. Churches that are lazy can become active. Churches that have stopped growing can actually grow. Churches that seem to be on the brink of destruction can rise from the ashes to be active and successful in serving God. What about the congregation of which you are a member today? Are you doing your part to make it the kind of church the Lord wants it to be, and the kind of church the scriptures indicate that it has to be?

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