

A9 BIBLE STUDY: I CORINTHIANS #5

Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 5: 1~13

In this chapter apostle Paul commands the congregation to keep themselves pure by driving out the person who has committed sexual fornication from its midst. Thus, Paul addresses the church's obligation to keep itself holy and pure before God. At the same time his exhortation points to an important theological question of whether a Christian's soul can still be saved after a grave sinning.

1. Consequence of sexual fornications

Paul is addressing the fornication case where a believer of this church was having a sexual relationship with his father's wife, who apparently was not his mother. Mosaic Law strictly prohibits such an act of fornication as follows:

Cursed is the one who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's bed.' "And all the people shall say, 'Amen!' [Deut 28: 20]

Reuben, Jacob's first-born son, had an intercourse with Bilha, one of Jacob's concubines. And this came to Jacob's knowledge. Although Reuben was not killed for this sin, he received a less than excellent blessing from his father before Jacob's death, as described in Genesis 49:

*Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength,
The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.
Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled it—He went up to my couch.*

Because of this serious sin Reuben lost his birth right as the first-born. Instead Judah was given the birth right as the successor of the lineage of faith that starts from Adam to Jesus, as shown in Luke 3. So out of Judah the Messiah came to be born.

... the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham... [Luke 3: 32-34]

Thus, Reuben's violation of his own father's marriage bed resulted in loss of a privileged place in the Kingdom of God permanently although he did not lose his salvation.

Another man who committed the same sin against his father was Absalom, David's third son, who rebelled against King David and willfully committed this sin in the eyes of all Israel as he had been persuaded by a wrong counsellor.

And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

Absalom, loved much by David, lost not only his father's love but met a sad end of his rebellion in a tragic death, which seemed to do some justice to his sins. Some people meet the punishment they deserve while here on the earth and others in eternity. God's justice shall be upheld sooner or later and all our sins will bear their consequences unless they are dealt with through God's mercy while there is opportunity.

Discussion topic: Has God relaxed His standard on sexual fornications? Discuss this as regards to the contemporary American society's acceptance of LGBT life styles.

2. Church's obligation to keep itself holy and godly

In our study of Romans 7 we learned that God had a purpose in giving the Mosaic Law to His people during their wilderness journey as follows:

First, Paul says the commandment of the law was 'ordained to life' [v.10]. In other words, the law was given to enrich the lives of the people of God, to help them achieve true, blessed life in God. Moses told the people of Israel that keeping the commandments was their way of honoring and thus showing that they respect, fear and worship God:

Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I am the Lord. You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you. [Leviticus 22: 31-32]

Secondly, the law was also given to this people to make them a holy people amongst the heathen, ungodly nations:

Thirdly, the law was also a way for God to bless His people.

The congregation of Israel who traveled towards the Promised Land was the first church of God. God was pleased when this first congregation kept the laws of God and were shaped into a holy people unto Him.

Israel was holiness to the Lord, the first fruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them," says the Lord.' [Jeremiah 2:3]

For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.[Leviticus 11: 45]

The New Testament church is the successor of this OT church. Therefore, God's expectation towards His church stands the same and the first quality God requires in His church is holiness. Thus, Paul exhorts the church at various locations to be holy.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. [Romans 12: 1]

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. [Ephesians 5: 5-7]

Peter also exhorts the church to be holy by citing God's command in OT era.

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." [1 Peter 1: 15]

One important way for God's church to keep itself holy is to not follow the lax morality of the society including sexual culture and standard. We are so immersed in lax sexual standard and culture that are comparable to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. How a church can encourage and help its congregation to keep themselves holy is a major issue of Christian ministry today.

A first step towards holiness of the church is for the ministers and priests to keep themselves pure and separated from this corrupting wave of immorality.

Secondly, it is the duty of those in the ministry to make clear what God's standard of morality is. Many people think that God changes His principles. Although God has allowed His people to creatively use modern ways to serve Him and serve the world's needs, He has not changed His principles. God's words shall not fall and people shall be judged by His words on the final day.

Modern technologies have enabled feeding the world's hungry and to make life easier and convenient. But the resulting convenience and time saved are for driving people to busier life and to continual pursuit of unsatiated desires, such advances would not be honoring God but whoring after human greed and desires.

Discussion topics:

1. How can a Christian keep himself/ herself pure and holy when many people around them are deeply immersed in sin and immorality?

2. What did Paul mean by 'purging out old leaven' in verse 8?

3. Can a born-again Christian's salvation assured regardless of sins?

In verse 3-5 apostle Paul makes an important statement regarding salvation of a sinful soul.

For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. [v. 3-5]

These verses refer to the fornicator in the Corinthian church. Paul had a concern for the spirit/ soul of this person and yet more concerned about the influence of the immorality of this person's life, which he considered as 'old leaven.' The bad leaven that can permeate through a contemporary American church is the influence of the culture of condoning and accepting immorality into the congregation. Accepting people of sinful backgrounds into the congregation through acceptance of the gospel and repentance is one thing. Allowing such people to keep practicing the past immoral life and thus letting their bad example affect the entire congregation is another matter that must be purged like 'old leaven.' This was true in the first century Corinthian church and is true in contemporary 21st century churches.

But the theological issue of discussion raised by the above verses is whether a saved, born-again Christian lose salvation because of sins or is his/her soul saved regardless of sinful life. Paul seems to imply that, although a minister, through prayer and supplication to God, deliver such a person to Satan so that Satan can destroy the person's body, the person's soul could be saved in the day of the Lord. In other words, Paul seems to believe that saved people are forever saved. There are some questions associated with this theological position:

- 1) Did Jesus say anything about this issue?
- 2) If salvation is guaranteed, what is the need for continual sanctification and suffering?

In the evening of the last supper our Lord prayed to God about His disciples as follows:

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. [John 17: 11-12]

Our Lord confessed that He did what he could to protect all of His disciples except Judas Iscariot. And He prayed that God the Father would keep them for His own name's sake. This prayer does not indicate and guaranteed salvation of the disciples of Christ. His prayer rather points to the need of God's protective grace and our Savior, from His throne in heaven, continues to beseech the Father to grant to His children in their struggles to keep true and holy.

The fact that our Savior did not lose the 11 disciples to Satan does not mean that their salvation and spiritual survival was assured. It was the result of their Lord's continual prayers for them, such as that for Peter prior to his denials of his master. If salvation is guaranteed, why does our Savior continue interceding on our behalf? The answer is clear; although God desires all His children to reach heaven safely after their life's journey is over, final reaching of the heavenly destiny is not guaranteed.

Now back to what apostle Paul wrote about the fornicator-- Paul's concern for this man's final salvation is clear from these two verses. He would rather Satan have him killed, in an accident or another cause, so that his sinful life would end there and that his soul could be saved on the Lord's Day of Judgment. In other words, to Paul this person's eternal welfare would be far better to be killed now by an accident than to continue his sinful life and lose his soul on the judgment day. And this position implies that a person can lose salvation through a sinful life even after the experience of being born again.

Discussion topic: What has been your belief in this theological point? Did you believe that a born-again Christian would never lose salvation? What is the basis of your belief?