

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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PURGE THE EVIL FROM AMONG YOU

In his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul responded to a report that came to him that they were accepting immorality among themselves, the likes of which did not even exist among the unbelievers (see 1 Corinthians 5). No one was discerning the seriousness of the situation, judging it, and taking action to remove the immoral one from their midst. It was a leaven in their midst, that if not removed, could infect the whole. Paul had written to them previously not to associate with immoral people, but he was clear that he was speaking of immoral believers or ones that were in the assembly and not ones who were of the world.

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (1 Corinthians 5.11-13 NASB)

According to Paul, within the church, there is to be, actually must be, judging of what is wicked. We just cannot turn our backs on it as if it does not exist. Some action must be taken. Interestingly, Paul quoted from Moses, as recorded in Deuteronomy.

“But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.”
(Deuteronomy 13.5 NASB, also 17.5)

I have written several issues based on Deuteronomy 13 after the Lord seemed to impress on my heart a caution over the signs and wonders that are being reported in our day. The caution is that the Lord could allow signs and wonders from prophets and dreamers of dreams to come true in order to test the heart of His people to see if they love Him. Of course, He knows whether we love Him or not, for He knows the heart of man, but He tests His people to reveal to them the condition of their heart. In other words, it is so that we will come to know the depth of our love or lack of love for Him. We are exhorted to cling to Him.

Now, as recorded in Deuteronomy, Moses gave many practical laws by which to judge the behavior of the sons of Israel. Some of the laws required death of the perpetrator, as in the case of the prophets or dreamers cited above. For the moment, put aside judgment that leads to capital punishment. One of the laws given through Moses dealt with the testimony or witness against another when an iniquity or sin had been committed.

“A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely,

then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” (Deuteronomy 19.15-21 NASB)

Notice how the judges were to investigate the matter and make a determination of how to resolve it. In like fashion, Paul wrote to the Corinthians who were going outside the church to resolve grievances.

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? (1 Corinthians 6.1-6 NASB)

According to Paul, the church should have wise men who can decide grievances between the brethren. Not only this, but they should also be able to deal with more severe situations such as immorality that will leaven the body of believers if not purged.

Now, before anyone thinks this means that we are to impose death sentences or impose harsh punishment on our brethren, let it be clearly understood that judgment within the church is for the purpose of restoration and correction, not destruction. Paul clearly tells us so in his epistle to the Galatians.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6.1-3 NASB)

Restoring one caught in trespass may require some difficult discipline of the person, but it is always to be with a view to restore the person and bring him back into fellowship. Paul rejoiced that his strong words to the Corinthians caused sorrow to the point of repentance, that is, changed minds (2 Corinthians 7.9). His strong words were given so that they would know the love which he had especially for them (2 Corinthians 2.4). It is also apparent that the discipline taken against the brother caught in immorality produced godly sorrow, and then Paul encouraged them to forgive and comfort the brother; otherwise he might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. He urged them to reaffirm their love for him (2 Corinthians 2.7-8).

This is the heart of one who knows how to rightly judge within the church, for such a one has the law of Christ written on his heart. What is this law? It is the law of love!

“A new commandment [law] I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13.34 NASB)

Too many in our day are too quick to write off others who stumble or fall. The wicked may need to be purged from among us for a season, for Paul even determined to turn the immoral brother over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. This was the death that Paul sought, but it was with a view to saving the brother's spirit in the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5.5). Paul was spiritual and he sought for restoration through love. As Paul wrote, **love never fails** (1 Corinthians 13.8). Love seeks to build up and to restore, not to destroy.

Dear brethren, where are the wise men that can discern and judge within the house of God? Where are the spiritual brethren that have the law of Christ written on their hearts and that know how to restore the transgressors in a spirit of love and gentleness? Be assured; the judges are coming!