

Two Men Have an Unfaithful Child

Bill and Fred are both faithful in their attendance and active in the work of the local church, but unfortunately both men have a grown child who does not serve the Lord faithfully. The spiritual lives of Bill and Fred seem similar in many ways, but when it comes to dealing with the unfaithful child there is a big difference.

When Bill is asked about his son, he is honest in describing the situation and urges everyone to do all they can to help restore his son to faithfulness. On the other hand, if anything is said to Fred, he immediately becomes defensive and makes excuses for his son. While Bill wishes people would be more direct in dealing with the soul-threatening sin in his son's life, Fred continually worries that someone is going to say the wrong thing to his son and "offend" him.

There are a lot of "Bills" who understand the danger their erring children are in and seek the help of all. But tragically, there are far too many "Fred's" who seem so worried about the feelings of their children that they make excuses for them, cover up for them, perhaps try to keep people from even finding out about them and become resentful toward those who do try to help.

When people are overtaken in sin fellow-Christians have an obligation to restore them (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19, 20). As parents, we must make certain that we do not stand in the way of those seeking to restore the erring. To carry it even further, are the parents themselves excused from the obligation to "restore such a one"? It has to be truly heart-breaking and gut-wrenching for a parent to see the church withdraw from one of their children (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15), but a parent who has the proper faith in God and a true love for his child rejoices that others care enough about their child to follow God's plan. Though painful, they trust that the desired end is that "his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Let us love our children; seek to train them when they are young and then remember two things if they should choose not to remain faithful:

- 1) We must love Jesus (and His teachings) even more than our children (Matthew 10:37).
- 2) Our love for our children is a very shallow love if it does not extend to their souls.

Parents, please think carefully about this painful subject. Do not ever allow your love, pride, embarrassment, shame or anything else to stand in the way of that which is needed to bring your child to repentance.

- by John R. Gibson

The Church's Purpose

What is the purpose of the Lord's church? Is it to eradicate poverty, disease, social injustice, illiteracy from among men? Is it to bring about a cessation of war and conflict? Is it to campaign for a temptation-free society for Christians to live in?

If the church had as one of its great goals the eradication of disease, the Lord could have easily equipped it to accomplish that goal. Could not the same power that enabled one blind man to see have enabled all blind men to see; that enabled one lame man to walk have enabled all lame people to walk; that cured many people of varied diseases have cured all people of all diseases? And could not this same power have been given to the church in all generations?

If the church has as one of its great goals the eradication of poverty, the Lord could have easily equipped it to accomplish this purpose. After all, He fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. He similarly fed four thousand on another occasion. Could not He who did these marvelous works have enabled His church in all generations to feed, clothe, and shelter the impoverished masses of the world through miraculous powers?

If the Lord had wanted His church to become a lobbyist group to apply political pressure toward a temptation and persecution free society in which to live, He would have given instructions in that direction. He did not even lead His church into a direct effort to destroy slavery, but taught the Christian slave to be a better slave and the Christian master to treat his slaves as he would have his heavenly Master treat him (Col. 3:22-4:1).

The church's purpose is to save souls and prepare people for eternity- It holds out to the impoverished the hope of some day walking a street of gold; to the suffering a time when there will be no pain; to the sorrowing a moment when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

It tells the tempted and persecuted that there is value in these afflictions, that the testing of their faith is "more precious than of gold," and to rejoice - It tells all to live godly lives in whatever environment they find themselves. It seeks to change people through the power of the gospel, not society through the coercion of legislators - Its weapons "are not carnal, but are mighty through God." Its motivating theme: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

When churches become involved in hospital and health clinic work, or when they build schools for the education of their children, or when they see as one of their great missions to provide for the world's poverty, or when they feel obligated to create social upheaval and campaign for human rights, or when they feel called upon to express their views on the government's use of nuclear armaments or whatever, they have a distorted view of the purpose of the church.

- by Bill Hall

Keeping Things "Mended"

When Jesus called James and John to be His disciples, they were "... *in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets*" (Matt. 4:21).

Think for a moment about fishermen "*mending*" their nets. The nets were a precious thing to these men. Their livelihood depended upon them. Therefore, it was important to keep them in top shape. After every use they were carefully cleaned and examined. Any small tear or rip was immediately repaired. Left untended, a small break in the net would soon lead to a large hole and the efficient working of the net would be ruined. Fish would be lost. In a short time the tiny flaw would become so large as to make the net unusable. Finally the net would be irreparable.

Look at another passage where the same word "*mending*" ('katartizo' in the Greek) is used: "*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1 Cor. 1:10). Here the Greek word 'katartizo' is translated by the phrase "*perfectly joined together.*" If you consider it, there are some interesting parallels between the physical act of fishermen "*mending*" their nets and Christians striving to be "*perfectly joined together.*" For instance, unity among brethren ought to be very precious to us. Our spiritual welfare depends upon it. We should realize the importance of maintaining unity, keeping a watchful eye on any situation that might threaten it. When a small dissention arises, we should address it immediately. Too often a small problem - left untended - grows into a large one. Efficiency in the church is ruined - souls are lost. As the rift grows larger, the church becomes useless to the Lord. Finally, the division becomes irreparable.

Christian, are you "*endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:3)?

- by Greg Gwin