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Church Discipline

A member of the body of Christ was living in unrepentant sin, he'd "suffered shipwreck in regard to [his] faith" (1 Timothy 1:19). Though he knew God's word said that what he was doing was wrong, he nevertheless refused to listen; his sin was too lovely to him.

Sadly, such a spiritual travesty is all too common in the body of Christ. It most certainly was in Paul's day where we read of Demas, Alexander the coppersmith, Hymenaeus, Judas, and the like. Each of these men forsook Christ for something in the world!

So what are we to do when a brother or sister chooses this path? The good news is that it is not up for discussion. We need not speculate! God has given us very specific guidelines for what ought to be done when a brother or sister is “caught in a trespass” (cf. Galatians 6:1)!

We are going to begin looking at the procedure for helping a brother or sister in sin as we take up the topic of Church Discipline. This morning I want to begin by looking at the foundation upon which the teaching and instruction for this important pastoral tool rests. We begin our study considering the Kingdom of God.

Genesis 1:27-28, “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Genesis 2:15, “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”

Genesis 2:20, “And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.”

These opening chapters of the Bible tell us much more than simply “God created all things.” What is revealed is nothing less than the establishing of a kingdom — God’s Kingdom — on this earth. We say this for five reasons:

1. The Royal Language, We read of “regency,” “co-reigning,” “ruling,” “serving,” and “caring for.” In fact, this language continues throughout God’s word. Truly the Lord is a King! And when He created this world, He fashioned it to be His Kingdom!
2. There is a strong emphasis on higher and lower realms. Authoritative strata in which the lower realm is subservient to the higher! For example, we read of:
 - a. Light out of darkness, v. 4.
 - b. The heavens and earth from the water, vv. 7-10.
 - c. The plants from the earth, vv. 11-12.
 - d. The sun, moon, and stars from the heavens, vv. 14-15.
 The language speaks of a higher and lower strata from which something rules.
3. The Royal Dominions. The first three days of creation involved the making of three spheres in which the “rulers” of days 4-6 were to reign...

Spheres of Rule	Rulers
Day 1: Day and Night	Day 4: Sun to rule the day and the Moon to rule by night
Day 2: Water below and Sky above	Day 5: Birds and Fish to rule Sky and Water
Day 3: Dry land and Vegetation	Day 6: Animals ruling over the land and Man ruling over all!

4. The Royal Prerogatives.

- a. We read of the divine fiat- the royal command which instantly comes to pass. Genesis 1:3a, "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light..."
- b. God's royalty is further expressed in that He proclaimed the identity of what He made.

Genesis 1:5, "And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night..."- this culminated in Adam, as God's vice-regent, naming the animals...

Genesis 2:19, "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name."

5. The Royal Calling. When God created man and fashioned him in His own image, the Lord called him to co-reign and co-rule with God.

Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

Accordingly, as we gaze upon Genesis 1-2 we behold far more than simply the creation of a physical world. Rather, we see the creation and the establishment of a Kingdom in which God would co-reign with and through man unto His own glory and pleasure. Now all of this brings us to a coup.

At this point in creation we know that NOT all things were as they should have been. For among God's creation walked a deceiver. Isaiah speaking of Lucifer (Satan) whose name can be translated "star of the morning" was and is one of the most glorious angels which God made. And yet, sometime prior to the creation of man we read of Satan:

Isaiah 14:12-15, "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north [notice the Kingdom language]. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit."

At some point prior to the fall of man, this most glorious angel rebelled against God! He looked around and saw that no other created thing was as glorious as himself and so wondered why he too wasn't worshipped. In this rebellion, he took with him a third of the host of heaven (Revelation 12:4)!

Having been cast out of heaven and angered over God's refusal to share His glory with him, the devil deigned to hurt God, such that he endeavored to allure the crown of God's creation, man, to rebel against God- which brings us to the fall.

Genesis 3:1-7, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden"?'..."

You know the rest of this story. The man and the woman are tempted by the serpent to rebel against God in anticipation that they would become sovereign entities (as that is how Satan appeared to them). Yet in reality we know that they would become enslaved to the devil and so bound to do His will! James Montgomery Boice wrote this:

When individuals rebel against God, they don't achieve freedom. They fall into bondage, because rebellion is sin, and sin is a tyrant. (Boice, 1986, p. 121)

And so at the fall, God's vice-regents rebelled against the Lord, God's newly established Kingdom fell, and mankind became subject to the reign and rule of Satan — who, you will recall, was given dominion over the earth when he was cast out of heaven! Speaking of Satan Luke writes:

Luke 4:5-6, "And he led [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.'"

Every nation, kingdom, country, and people of this world is, in reality, a subject of the Kingdom of Satan. Accordingly, to speak of a man's sovereignty or autonomy is to speak of an illusion!

1 John 5:19, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one."

This passage says it all! There are only two kingdoms present today: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan! Those who are part of Satan's kingdom are ignorant subjects of this wicked being, "...having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26b)! This brings us to the counter-attack.

This truly is the glorious message of the Gospel — THE Good News! The coming of Christ marked a massive and violent in-breaking of God's Kingdom back into this world. Speaking of Christ, Paul wrote these words;

Colossians 2:15, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities [Paul is talking here about Satan and His demons], He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

At Christ's first advent, the Lord literally stripped Satan of his power (just as God promised in Genesis 3:15)! The imagery here is that of a Roman Triumph where the conquered army was paraded through the streets of Rome in chains! How and when did Christ do this?

Hebrews 2:14-15a, "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil..."

Starting at the cross and then through His resurrection, Christ destroyed the power of Satan! This adversary still is quite active on this earth, BUT the snow has begun to melt (think of the *Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe*)!

1 John 3:8, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

In Christ's first advent, the Lord crushed the power that Satan had over death! This became the foundation of the good news Christ proclaimed while on the earth. And what was that good news? If you think it was confined to His death on the cross or the forgiveness of sin, then your thinking is rather limited (and quite frankly, somewhat man-centered)!

Matthew 4:23, "And *Jesus* was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom..."

This is such a crucial message! When we think of Christ's first advent we think of our salvation — which is not wrong, just incredibly incomplete. When Christ came to the earth, He did so to re-establish the Kingdom of God on the earth!

Luke 17:20-21, "Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here *it is!*" or, "There *it is!*" For behold, the kingdom of God is within you.'"

From all of this we conclude that from the fall onward a war has raged between the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of God. And insofar as you and I do NOT see that war, BUT rather consider this world a friend of grace, we have bought into the lie that Satan has used to deceive mankind! Accordingly, in the words of Peter, we must "be alert" (1 Peter 5:8a)! We live in a war zone in which Satan "...prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8b)! And yet, we must NOT be frightened! For consider the glorious consequences of God's people.

As citizens of the kingdom of God, we enjoy protection from the enemies of God.

1 Peter 2:9a, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for

God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Do you understand the significance of this passage as it relates to your sojourn on this earth? We are God's people; we are a set-apart nation; we constitute the Kingdom of God! As such, we enjoy a protection and care granted us in Christ! This partly is what is involved in being a "saint" — a set apart one. Because we have been "set apart" we have become the property of God! Accordingly, Satan "cannot touch us" (1 John 5:18b) unless he gets prior approval from the Lord. Recall, though Satan desired the destruction of Job, he was impotent to do anything until God removed the boundary of His sovereign care. Until then, all that Satan could do was scheme for Job's downfall- as he told God:

Job 1:11-12, "'But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.' Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.' So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord."

Do you understand that Satan is impotent to do anything to a citizen of God's Kingdom?

1 John 4:4b, "...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

Again, recall the teaching of John.

1 John 5:18b, "...He who was born of God keeps [the believer] and the evil one does not touch him."

Truly when it came to Satan's attack on Job, the devil was impotent to do anything except what God ordained! You say, *"Job is part of the poetic books of the Bible; as such we can't conclude anything from this about our security in Christ."*

Luke 22:31-32a, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat..."

Though this is speaking of Peter, nevertheless the teaching holds true for all God's children. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, in and through all things we are protected by God! From these passages and the many more that detail our position before God in Christ, we conclude that as members of the Kingdom of God, "[We] are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5)! As such, though Satan would like nothing less than to sift us like wheat, he is impotent to do so. As a toothless, clawless foe, all he can do is growl at us unless God deems otherwise! Accordingly, we "do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather [we] fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28)! That is most encouraging! Yet there is more...

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we enjoy protection even from ourselves, There couldn't be

a more obvious truth that in our sin we are set on self-destruction, Jeremiah 17:9; Job 5:7; Romans 7:14-15.

Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”

In contexts which proclaim the sinfulness of our hearts, I have been quick to teach that oft-times the greatest threat to our welfare today in Christ is NOT

- A bad companion.
- An evil government.
- The threat of religious persecution.
- Or Satan himself.

RATHER, our greatest threat is ourselves! As Christians we are our worst enemy! Aren't we?

Job 5:7, “For man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward.”

This is not talking about lost and fallen man, but every man on account of his sin. In fact, is not our greatest lament our sin? Speaking as a Christian, Paul confessed this:

Romans 7:14-15, “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”

Though God has delivered us out of the reign and rule of Satan and placed us in His Kingdom, we oft-times play the fool! Thinking that we are stronger than we really are, we are vulnerable to all kinds of attack.

Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.”

And yet as our King, what has God done in light of this propensity? Through the process of sanctification, the Lord continues to keep us from self-destruction, Romans 7:22-25a; Jude 24; Hosea 2:6-7a. I love how Paul put it:

Romans 7:22-25a, “For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. [Once again, we see our bent for self-destruction. Yet notice the solution...] Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

in fact, in one of my favorite endings of an epistle, Jude wrote this:

Jude 24, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy...”

Do you understand that because we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Lord won't allow us free access to the sin we so eagerly desire? God is not against us for our sin, but ever and always for us against our sin! This is why He disciplines us. Speaking in reference to His rebellious people, God said this:

Hosea 2:6-7a, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*..."

Isn't this wonderful? In His sovereignty God has deigned to protect us from ourselves! Now don't miss it! If God gave His Son that we might be delivered from our sin, to what length will He go to protect us from our sin?

In light of all of this, I want you to reflect with me upon the passage I read at the beginning of this sermon (1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

At Corinth an individual fell into horrible sin. There was a man who took his father's wife — most likely his step-mother — and he was sleeping with her! This violates so many boundaries of righteousness and decency. It simply is unthinkable! Now because the individual was unrepentant AND because he was a child of God (a citizen of the Kingdom of God) Paul instructed the leadership of the church as to what they were to do. And what was that? They were to deliver him over to Satan!

In the coming weeks we are going to discuss this passage in full, but for now understand what Paul is talking about here. It is possible to be a child of God and yet NOT enjoy the protection of the Lord on account of unrepentant sin. In such a condition, the soldier of the Lord is abandoned, as it were, in the middle of the battle!

Such is the case when it comes to the unrepentant sinner! When a valid church court disciplines an individual such that they are excommunicated, God lifts His protection, and the individual is abandoned to live on this earth without the special care of God. It might be tempting to say, "So big deal. The person now lives like most of the world, outside of Christ." Yet that is not exactly the case. The person is not living as the non-Christian does. Satan has no qualms with his followers. The vast majority are free to live their life of delusion untouched by him. Rather the disciplined Christian is living as a traitor in a land filled with demons, rogues, and criminals who now have free access to him.

Think of a policeman behind bars. A traitor being returned to the country he betrayed. That is what takes place when a person is excommunicated from the church: they are handed over to the enemy, as we'll talk about soon, "...for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus!"

It is so important that we understand this. When an excommunication occurs, it is NOT that we

are so upset by another's sin that we kick them out of our "club." RATHER it is God, moved by love, withdrawing His covenant care from an individual who has sworn allegiance to Christ and so remains the enemy of Satan!

References

Boice, J. M. (1986). *Foundations of the Christian Faith* . Downers Grove: IVP Academic.