

## Do we share in the evil deeds of others or do we seek their repentance?

Some time ago I heard of a friend whose wife abandoned their wonderful family, getting a divorce, to “live her own life”, as she said. I felt so sorry for this family and my friend. Then after a few months I learned that some believers had normal contact with her, as if nothing had happened. Perhaps they were thinking “it is none of my business; I will be nice to everybody”. I felt sad about it, as it seemed to me as approval of the acts of that person. Shouldn't the believers rush to correct this person and if she insisted then distance themselves so that she can feel her error, through their disapproval, and perhaps repent? Was their tolerance in obedience to God's Word or simply to the world, where “everybody can do what makes him feel good and it is none of our business to say anything against his acts”? I turned to the Word of God to find some answers, which I would like to share with you today. So let's go to the second epistle of John, where we read:

### 2 John 9-11

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

Here John does not seem to share the spirit of “unconditional tolerance”, which is so abundant in our age. He tells us that if a person does not stay in the doctrine of Christ then we should not receive him in our house and nor even greet him! What is the reason for this? Because, by doing this we share in his evil deeds. Basically if we are indifferent, if we say “it is not my business what he does” and continue our relationship with that

person as if nothing has happened, then we basically approve his or her behavior and therefore share through our approval to his evil doings.

Of course everybody of us can fall astray. We should in a humble spirit of love always try to correct each other. But if there is no repentance, then we should take distance. Just being "tolerant and nice" would make us share with their evil deeds as basically what we communicate in this way is "there is no problem with us; it is your business; Do whatever you want". This is in effect like giving this person approval from our side for his acts, thus preventing him from repentance. Because it is exactly repentance and return that God wants from a person who fell astray. And what we are saying to the person who abandoned the doctrine of Christ, by not greeting him and receiving him is "we don't approve of your acts; please repent!"

Now let's see an example of the above in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul heard that a member of the church was living immorally. So immorally that not even the Gentiles did not dare to live! He also heard that the church was doing nothing about it. Perhaps as some of us would do today, would consider it none of their business. But it is not like this. In the church we are a family. And when a member falls astray the other members should seek to make him repent and bring him back. This was not happening in the Corinthians church. Let's read:

### 1 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 Corinthian church was puffed up. Instead of mourning for that person, they were being rather indifferent, leaving the unrepentant person among them, like nothing had happened. And Paul continues:

### 1 Corinthians 5:3-5

“For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 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.”

When somebody abandons God, he passes to the terrain of Satan. Paul and the church would have handed him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, says Paul. But he does not stop there. He also says that the reason they would be doing this was: “so that His spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”. What I believe this means is that by delivering him to Satan, He would suffer in his flesh – being out of God’s terrain, out of the family of Christ. This would crash him and bring him to repentance so that, because of his repentance, he will be saved in the day of the Lord. Hardships and suffering is for a sinner, apart from anything else, also a way through which this person may repent. Let’s bring the prodigal son into our minds. He abandoned his father’s house. He went to a strange country where he lost everything. Everything the good father had made for him was spent in harlots and sinful living! Then the famine came and as we read:

### Luke 15:14-19

“But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ‘I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned

against heaven and before you, “and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”

The famine and the suffering, was what made him to come to himself, repent and go back to his father. Suffering then in the land of a strange kingdom (Satan) is a tool that could make people repent, leave that kingdom and come back to the loving Heavenly Father and the Kingdom of His wonderful Son. That’s why Paul was very upset with the Corinthians, and the church, with Paul present in the spirit, hand this person over to Satan, waiting to get him back; waiting that, though his flesh would be destroyed, he would, through repentance, be present with them in the day of the Lord.

Paul, taking opportunity from this event, gives them a more general lesson:

### 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 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. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

Paul does not ask us to cut any contact with those of the world living in sin. Otherwise we should stop working and living in the world, getting ourselves in absolute seclusion. No this is not what Paul meant. What Paul meant was the church. As he said: “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. ” (1 Corinthians 5:11). It is basically what we read in 2 John earlier:

### 2 John 1:10-11

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

If we instead of doing what God’s Word says, showing clearly our disapproval to the acts of that person, we choose to do what the world says (“just be nice to everybody; smile; it is not your business”), then what this person would think is: “What I’m doing is tolerated and I do not need to change. It does not bother anyone”. Thus we are enabling this person to continue in his deeds, as we are strengthening – through our indifference – his hands. Hence we are sharing in his evil deeds! Let it be clear: our indifference and adherence to worldly naïve ideas of how we as Christians should behave in the church family (“be nice with everybody, smile and do not hurt their feeling, even if they sin” ) can be fatal! First and foremost for that person but also for us, who do not clearly show our disapproval to his acts, thus effectively accepting and sharing indirectly in what he is doing. Furthermore, not only that person may say “there is no problem with what I’m doing”, but other believers with not so strong roots seeing this may be affected and encouraged to do the same, as “all seems to be fine and nobody cares; therefore it is acceptable”. This is what Paul means when in verse 6 of the same chapter says:

### 1 Corinthians 5:6

“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”

Just a little portion of leaven is enough for the whole bread! Similarly, when a brother involved in a serious sin is left without correction, without repentance, and remaining in the church, there is the risk that his sinful behavior affects the whole

church. The church is a gathering of repented sinners but not a gathering of unrepentant ones who consciously choose their sinful ways instead of God's way.

Some may say "yes but the Lord did not correct the sinners". Really? Of course He did. Do you think He was indifferent? Yes He did not hit them with a Bible on the head, but He did tell them to go and sin no more. His invitation to people who were living in sin, was an invitation of change, which means repentance! When the Pharisees brought to him a woman caught in adultery and were ready to stone her, asking Him whether He approves it, He, after pointing out that everybody is a sinner, turned to the woman and said: "Neither do I condemn you; GO AND SIN NO MORE" (John 8:11)! He did not simply say to her "I do not condemn you", but also "repent", change your life! "Sin no more", start new! I hope she did it! This is what we also should say to those of the believers who live in sin, instead of sending "happy birthdays", smiles and hugs which signal basically your acceptance of their behavior.

When Zacchaeus one of the top tax collectors, a class of people famous for cheating others during tax collection, responded to Jesus' invitation, he turned away from his past sinful deeds and REPENTED. As we read:

#### Luke 19:8-10

"Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

The Lord came to seek and to save that which is lost. Salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus, because he repented, changing his ways. As God says in Ezekiel 18:23:

#### Ezekiel 18:23

“Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?”

God does not want anybody to be lost! As Jesus said:

Luke 15:7

“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”

A party is taking place in heaven for every sinner who repents! Repentance is what God wants!

As a short conclusion: when see a brother or a sister sinning, we should not consider that this is not our business. This is the spirit of the world; not the spirit of God. Instead we should confront these persons in a meek spirit, trying to bring them back to the right path. If they deny coming back, we should distance ourselves from them, waiting for their repentance. Tolerating sinful behavior strengthens their hands in what they are doing, moves them away from the path of repentance and makes us indirectly participating in their sinful deeds. Instead of being “nice” and indifferent, we should, apart from lovingly correcting them, continue to pray for them so that God opens their eyes to repentance, whatever it may take. Even if this takes the “destruction of the flesh” as the person in the Corinthian church or to “be in much need in a strange land” as the prodigal son.

Anastasios Kioulachoglou