

Pentheo

By Pastor Greg
February 28, 2010

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Bunkertown COB

As far as her children and 6-million other people around the world are concerned, Shirley Jackson is as good as dead, has been for several years. In 1995 she was "disfellowshipped," excommunicated or shunned from the Jehovah's Witnesses. Excommunicating is among the Witnesses' highest forms of discipline, reserved for those who disobey religious teachings and will not repent.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe this is an act of love, intended to inspire sinners to change their ways so eventually they can be readmitted to the faith. So, what crime against God did Shirley commit? She began having doubts about Witness theology. She did not sense God at their Kingdom Hall. She didn't feel very spiritual going door to door in order to earn converts. My, oh my, such wicked sins! Elders disfellowship 50,000 to 60,000 Witnesses around the world each year. Maybe that's why they feverishly seek new converts.

The passage they use to validate their action can be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, specifically verse 5. *"I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. I am told that a man in your church is living in sin with his stepmother. ²You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship. ³Even though I am not with you in person, I am with you in the Spirit. And as though I were there, I have already passed judgment on this man ⁴in the name of the Lord Jesus. You must call a meeting of the church. I will be present with you in spirit, and so will the power of our Lord Jesus. ⁵Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns".* ¹ (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

People tend to run toward either end on this issue, some going to the extreme found in the Jehovah Witness Church, and others to the extreme found in the Corinthian Church where no one seemed to care how a person lived out their

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Christian faith; where people acted with indifference as a brother or sister walked a path to destruction.

Remember what Paul has been saying. He's talked about the problems of division. He's talked about how a Christian must mature in their faith based upon the proper foundation. He's addressed the need to be humble. And here we see the need to love. The biggest issue he has here is not the man's sin, but the indifference by the rest of the church. Here was a man whose actions were leading him to destruction. But his church family didn't seem to care. They didn't care that this man quite possibly would destroy his Christian faith and his Christian witness. It is the absence of *Pentheo* (mourning or sadness) that concerns Paul. If there truly was unity in this church, they would be concerned, not just for this man's Christian witness, but for the overall witness of the church. They would be concerned for this man's Spiritual life, and the Spiritual life of the church. But instead there was apathy. They didn't seem to care about anything; not the man nor the church.

Looking closely here, it's important to note that this man possibly was a believer (see verse 11). And Paul's ultimate goal is his restoration, not expulsion (see verse 5). I know what he says here sounds harsh, to throw the man out and hand him over to Satan, but he uses a word that speaks of tenderly setting aside (or "set out"). It is not to be done harsh or cruel. A church is to hand someone over to Satan with sadness in their heart. A fellowship of believers is to be so united that they approach this process with regret, as if they were bearing some of the responsibility. Yet in Corinth no one seemed to care. There was no concern; no sadness, no mourning (*Pentheo*).

This is a tough piece of scripture. Doesn't it sound like Paul is urging us to throw someone into the claws of Satan? I thought our responsibility was to rescue them from his snare? Well, yes we are. But a church is also supposed to help a person mature in the faith, and build that faith upon a proper foundation. Truthfully, this man was already ensnared by Satan, so a little discipline was necessary to remind him that this behavior will destroy himself and the church.

What Paul is suggesting is not to hand them over to Satan so that they might lose their salvation, but so that they might come to their senses and return to the

Father. In a similar way this is what Jonah did when he told the sailors to throw him off the boat. In the belly of the great fish, Jonah seems to come to his senses. But the best example can be found in Luke 15.

In the story of the Prodigal son, we find a young man leaving his father's protection. The father lets him go, but continually looks for his son's return. The son knew that he now had the freedom to practice a riotous lifestyle. Once all was lost he came home. He came to his senses. Did the father send him away with viciousness and wrath? Of course not. He did this with *Pentheo*; mourning and regret. That's why the son was willing to come back. Had he been driven away in anger this prodigal would never thought he had the freedom to come home.

In 2 Corinthians 2 we are led to believe this man did in fact repent of his sin, looking to be restored. *⁵I am not overstating it when I say that the man who caused all the trouble hurt all of you more than he hurt me. ⁶Most of you opposed him, and that was punishment enough. ⁷Now, however, it is time to forgive and comfort him. Otherwise he may be overcome by discouragement. ⁸So I urge you now to reaffirm your love for him.*² (2 Corinthians 2:5-8) If this is true, we find that what Paul suggested did indeed work. This fellow repented of his sin and longed to be restored.

So how does a text that looks like it deals with church discipline fit within a lesson on unity? It fits when we understand that a major part of unity is compassion for our brethren. Because the person who has sinned really means something to us, because they are near and dear to our heart, we want to rescue them from the sin that has ensnared them. A church that is built upon Christian love realizes that indifference toward the lives of others will not only destroy them, but destroy the church as well. This is the church that not only mourns for the lost, but demonstrates *Pentheo* to those whose lives are still held captive by the great deceiver.

Somehow our actions need to demonstrate that we really do care; that we would care enough to stop the person who is about to step off a cliff. Is it love that alerts them to the peril, or is it passing judgment. You tell me,

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.