

## The Way of the Lord

### 19. Your Relationship With Your Lord Jesus (Part 4)

In this segment we'll discuss a hindrance to spiritual power that *permeates* westernized Christendom—*communal UNrighteousness*. Scripture is clear that followers of Jesus in the earliest church were serious about upholding *COMMUNAL RIGHTEOUSNESS* in their faith communities. They readily understood this from the history of their Israelite ancestors: when ONE person in their midst clung to unconfessed sin, ALL of them were held accountable by God.

This scriptural truth is vital for your life journey in Jesus, and may be one of the most costly for you to embrace. That's why the Apostle Paul was so adamant that believers who *refused* to repent and confess their sin would no longer share biblical fellowship: "...you must not ASSOCIATE with anyone who calls himself a BROTHER but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.... EXPEL the wicked man from among you" (1Corinthians 5:11-13).

Tolerating ongoing sin in faith communities is widespread in the US. That's why we want to delve into this topic with you. People have lost awareness of how the sin of one person influences others to sin as well. (See Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 22:21-24; 24:7.) In the Book of Deuteronomy, God repeatedly commanded the Israelites to *purge the evil from among them*. That's because one person's evil influence could cause many to sin.

As a result, COMMUNAL AWARENESS was deeply engrained in the early followers of Jesus because of their Hebraic heritage. They were keenly concerned with more than just individual righteousness. As the spiritually living Body of Christ they understood the reality of COLLECTIVE righteousness. And they knew from the Hebrew Scriptures how *one person's* sin brought dire consequences to others *collectively*.

- God prevented the entire nation of Israel from conquering the city of Ai because of the hidden sin of one man, Achan (see Joshua 7).
- In disobedience to God, David numbered his troops, and thousands died of the plague (1 Chronicles 21).
- Korah's rebellion resulted in the death of not only himself but his entire family as well as the families of the other rebels (Numbers 16).

You can see, then, that the first followers of Jesus understood that God held THEM collectively responsible when someone among their people sinned. They also recognized that our Lord upheld this same standard of righteousness for the fledgling Church as He did for His people, Israel. Think about Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:1-11). Father made sure their hidden sin was exposed. He didn't want anything hindering the prayers of the others in their faith community.

Anchor these truths for yourself and let them guide YOUR fellowship with each other. Confronting someone who strays is the LOVING thing to do! (James 5:19,20) Our Lord DOES hold us responsible to confront our brother or sister so they might repent and confess their sin (Galatians 6:1,2). A little leaven of tolerated sin DOES leaven the whole batch of believers within a faith family (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

A fellowship family is a single body with many interconnected parts (1 Corinthians 12:26,27). And the unrepentance of one person in a fellowship family

hinders our Father from answering the prayers of EVERYONE in that body; they're entertaining unrighteousness in their midst. In a sense, *sin* isn't the problem. UNREPENTANCE and the toleration of UNCONFESED sin violates our holy God and closes His ears to their prayer (see 1 Peter 3:12).

In *Matthew 18:15-20* Jesus declares we have a communal responsibility to confront unconfessed sin in each other as family in Him. It begins with going to an unrepentant person alone. If he refuses to listen, you take two or three others with you to confront him. If he still refuses to turn from sin and turn to God, your faith community should confront him and expel him if he won't repent. Why? So you can maintain communal righteousness. As a result, your Father will hear your prayers, and you and your faith family can bring forth testimonies to His glory and faithfulness.

It's very evident in *both* Testaments of God's Word that He has absolutely no toleration for sin. Through the reconciling blood of Jesus our Father has made the way for us to restore fellowship with Him through repentance and confession. And, He holds us accountable to love one another enough to confront unconfessed sin (Luke 17:3). That way we can enjoy communal righteousness in AUTHENTIC fellowship with each other and with God.

We mentioned at the beginning that upholding righteousness in your fellowship family may be difficult and costly, especially in this society in which there are no absolutes of right and wrong. So if you find that there's widespread toleration for sin among your fellowship group and they refuse to confront it, then it's time for you to leave, for righteousness' sake.

There IS a point we want to make regarding AUTHENTIC fellowship. The fellowship that's described in the Bible entails breaking bread together, worshipping God together, discussing and applying His Word together, and upholding communal righteousness together. Our heavenly Father has *four goals for biblical fellowship* among His children:

- 1. Your fellowship with others must spur you on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship, and living testimony (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- 2. Your fellowship with each other must spur you to grow in Christ's likeness through His Spirit in you (see Philippians 2:12).
- 3. Your shared fellowship must spur you toward repentance AND the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- 4. Your fellowship as extended spiritual family must spur you to reveal Jesus to the lost around you (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

If the people with whom you fellowship *aren't* mutual instruments of righteousness for each other in these ways, then consider how short you fall from our Lord's call and purpose for your lives. The *WAY* of the Lord has always been for His followers, both individually and collectively, to uphold communal righteousness for HIS Name's sake.

### **For Further Study:**

- Discussing How to Restore the Early Church, Lesson 45
- Teaching E-mail 31. *Shepherding A Fellowship Family*
- Hebraic Article: *I Hate Nicolaitanism!* (Part 3)

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