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From The Director



GUEST EDITORIAL

REACTIONS TO THE SINS OF OTHERS

Daniel F. Cates

How do we react when those around us commit sinful acts? How do we react when those around us live sinful lives? It is probable that we react in one of the following ways: either we ignore the sin, so as to avoid confrontation, or we magnify the sin, to feel better about our own transgressions, or we get frustrated by the sin, and begin to develop wrong attitudes in our lives, or we correct the one who has sinned, forgiving him as we have been commanded to do.

Some will ignore the sins of others, choosing to look only at the good things that one does, and not to look at those things which endanger the soul. When one reacts to another's sin in this way, who is benefited? The sinner is not benefited, for the sin that is ignored by others is one that likely will not be repented of, and, therefore, will not be forgiven! The one who ignores the sin is not benefited, for he bears the responsibility to help another be freed of the burden of sin (Gal. 6:1). It is likely that we have an example of this in the Old Testament with priest Eli. According to I Samuel 2:12-17, Eli's sons were exceedingly wicked; and, while Eli did confront them, the Bible says that Eli was "very old" when he did it (v. 22). The logical conclusion is that for many years he must have ignored what they were doing. Who was benefited by Eli's ignoring their sins? Not the sons, for they died in such a state that even their widows did not mourn (Psa. 78:64); not Eli, for, knowing that his sons had sealed their fate, he died upon hearing that the ark was taken, and not that his sons were dead (I Sam. 4:18); and not Israel, for Israel became so frustrated by the sins of these priests that they abhorred sacrificing to the Lord (2:17).

There are some who will magnify the sins of others, thereby excusing their own sins. They may, to friends who know their sinful practices, say, "Yes I am guilty of _____, but he is doing _____ which is much worse." They may simply use such as an occasion to justify, in their own minds, their sinful acts, saying, "I do not have to give up _____, because she calls herself a Christian, but she is a _____." Jesus spoke of this reaction to the sins of others when he was denouncing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who were quick to point out the faults of others while white-washing their own (Mat. 7:1-5; 23:27-28).

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Co-Editor's Column Some Marks of a Strong Church (I)

Garland Elkins



A Strong Church Has A Converted Membership

A congregation of unconverted sinners may be mistaken by some as a church of the Lord. However, they will act like sinners, and will still be sinners (Mat. 13:15). Christians are a converted, or changed, people as passages such as Matthew 18:1-3 and Acts 3:19 clearly teach.

A Strong Church Believes And Obeys The Word Of God Implicitly

It believes that God's converting power is in the gospel (Rom. 12:12; Col. 3:1-4). It believes that there is transforming power in the truth (Rom. 12:12; Col. 3:1-4). It believes that God will make all things work out for the good of the righteous (Jam. 5:16; Rom. 8:28). In short, a strong church is "rich in faith" (Jam. 2:5).

A Strong Church is a Studious Church

It continues in the apostle's doctrine (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 2:42; II Tim. 2:2). It has the word of God preached and taught in its services (Acts 11:26; II Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:7). Its members read the Bible and other good literature (John 5:39; II Tim. 2:15; I Tim. 4:13).

A Strong Church Worships As It Is Written

It conducts a truly scriptural and spiritual worship (John 4:24). It abides in the doctrine of Christ concerning matters of worship, as well as in everything else (Mat. 15:9; II John 9-11).

A Strong Church Keeps Unspotted from the World

Its members love righteousness and holiness (Heb. 12:14). They keep themselves pure, and separate from the contamination of the world (Mat. 5:8; I Tim. 5:22; Jam. 1:27; Titus 2:11-12). They hate sin; even their own sins, and they seriously seek to live above sin (Heb. 6:1; I Pet. 2:2; II Pet. 3:18). They recognize their imperfections, and that they sometimes commit sins. However, they do not live a life of sin. When they sin, they correct their wrongs in the sight of God and men (Acts 8:18-24; I John 1:9; Jam. 5:16).

A Strong Church Will Edify Itself

The church has a great mission: to "edify itself in love" (Eph. 4:12-16). Hence the church is to build itself up in love (Acts 20:32; Jude 20-21). The members of a strong church will follow after "things whereby we may edify one another" (Rom. 14:19).

A Strong Church Will Do Good Unto All Men

The Galatian letter was written to "churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to teach those congregations,

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(DAN CATES: Continued from Page 1)

While such may provide "conscience salve," for the one having this reaction, it provides no true benefit, for every sin bears the same penalty--death (Rom. 6:23).

Then, there are some who become frustrated when others sin. As a result, they either become slight in fulfilling their own responsibilities, or develop an improper attitude toward the sinners, or others, or even God. One example of this has already been given: the people of Israel were so frustrated by the sinfulness of Eli's sons, God's priests, that they abhorred, hated, performing the duties owed to the Lord (I Sam. 2:17). Another example is that of Moses after God commanded him to speak to the rock in Kadesh (Num. 20:8). The context shows that Miriam had just died (v. 1), and that Israel had been murmuring, and had been goading Moses (vv. 3-4). After this command of God, Moses, still burning with frustration toward the rebellious Israelites, smote the rock, thereby violating the simple command of God. While both the Israelites, in the former example, and Moses, in the latter example, had right motives (formerly to worship God properly, and later to follow Him patiently into the Promised Land), both allowed their frustrations to be stumbling-blocks which resulted in Israel's failure to worship properly and Moses' failure to enter the Promised Land at all. When we see others sin, let us not become so frustrated that we, ourselves, become guilty of sin.

Finally, there are some who will react to sin by helping the sinner to correct his sinful ways, and by forgiving him when he does. When Peter was guilty of preferring his Jewish brethren over his Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:12), and had even caused some to be carried away with him in his transgression (v. 13), Paul immediately corrected him (v. 11). To ignore the sin of another is the worst thing we can possibly do, while to point out, humbly and tactfully, the sin of another is the best thing we can possibly do! (Jam. 5:20). Furthermore, if when we have corrected another, he repents, the Christian bears the responsibility of forgiving him (Luke 17:3; Gal. 6:1). To correct and forgive are not mere suggestions for the one who wants to react correctly to the sins of others, they are necessities, for they are commanded by God!

Recognizing that we could ignore, magnify, be frustrated by, or correct and forgive the sin of others; when we are put into such situations let us do the latter, for in doing such, we will benefit the one who has sinned, and will fulfill our own responsibilities.

(ELKINS: Continued from Page 1)

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). A strong church will care for its own members, assist saints elsewhere who are in need, and, as opportunity arises and ability permits, will assist those who are in need who are not Christians (I Cor. 16:1-2; Gal. 6:10). As Galatians 6:10 teaches, special attention will be directed toward the household of faith. Through this good work, its light is made to shine in the community, and this will lead many to glorify God (Mat. 5:13-16).

A Strong Church Practices Love

It will practice the love that characterizes those of the same family (I John 3:11; I Pet. 2:17). It will have a special love for members of the congregation, and for the church everywhere. It will: speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), be fervent in love among itself (I Pet. 4:8), and will do everything in love (I Cor. 16:14).

A Strong Church Is A United Church

It has that unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20-21), "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Its members speak the same thing, and there are no divisions among them (I Cor. 1:10). They are of one accord, having one mind, practicing the same love for each other (Phi. 2:2). They follow the New Testament in all things therein revealed (II Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17). They follow the leadership of the elders in matters of expediency, and in all matters left to human wisdom and judgment (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28; I Cor. 10:23). Thus, they are able to have fellowship one with another (Acts 2:42; I John 1:7).

A Strong Church Has a Scriptural and Efficient Eldership

It will have a faithful, able leadership who love God and His work, and are "examples unto the flock" (I Pet. 5:3). They will not compromise with the enemies of righteousness. They will demonstrate their qualifications by, "holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9).

A Strong Church Will Preach The Gospel In Order To Save The Lost

The church is to carry out the Great Commission that the lost may be saved (Mark 16:15-16; II Tim. 2:2; Luke 19:10). Christ healed the sick and fed the hungry thousands. His church is to practice benevolence to saints and sinners (II Cor. 9:13; Jam. 1:27). However, we must never forget that all of this, and preaching the gospel, must be to save the lost (Luke 19:10; I Tim. 3:15).



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