
Words of Truth

What If The Withdrawn From Wants To Return To The Flock?

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Most biblical subject matters do not have a single, black and white answer. This is certainly true of what we are about to have a brief study about. As with all things, we have to be careful not to twist the Scriptures to an incorrect conclusion (II Peter 3:15-18). We have to be able to reason from the Scriptures (Acts 17:1-2). In our two articles previous to this one we have discussed someone not allowing sin to become their ruin (Ezekiel 18:30). We have discussed not giving up, even if the road to repentance is going to be long and difficult. Restoration to the Lord though also involves the brethren. Sometimes, that process becomes harder than it should (Luke 15:11-32). From the first days of the church, fellowship with the saints locally is part of God's will (Acts 2:42). Therefore, the faithful have to always consider how they would have to respond to the erring that wants to be restored.

When someone has been withdrawn from by individuals (I Timothy 6:3-5) or a congregation (II Thessalonians 3:6-15), all things are not always equal. Therefore, it is not possible for me, or any other teacher, to teach one lesson that would equally apply to all situations. A person withdrawn from for being divisive and creating discord among the saints (Romans 16:17-18) is going to have a different path to repentance than one withdrawn from for something that started as a private conflict (Matthew 18:15-17).

Before we proceed, let's consider something. Here is what we find about forgiving those wanting to repent of something they do to you or I: *"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him"* (Luke 17:3-4; cf. Matthew 18:15-35). What if you or I become unmerciful? Well, you can then know the Lord will not be merciful to you (Matthew 6:15 and James 2:9-13). What I want our study to turn to is, what we are to do in cases that involve congregational action. For this, we will consider a situation in Corinth.

The Instructions Concerning The Fornicator In Corinth

Paul and Sosthenes penned this to the congregation in Corinth: *"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among*

you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:1-8).

Then, in the second epistle we have to Corinth, we read this: *“But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (II Corinthians 2:1-11).*

What do we have in these things to learn? For one, a person can be cast out from the congregation and after time, they can return. Here was a fornicator. Maybe things will have to be different with different sins, but can we say that a person can NEVER come back to the fold? I know this is not an easy study, but the above ought to be something that gives us all pause in declaring we’d keep someone from being able to return to the assembly. Surely, precautions in some cases would have to be made. Yet, each of those cases would have to be considered apart from others. The end goal must be the salvation of the lost. Our Lord’s will in such is clear (Luke 15:1-10 and James 5:19-20).

Conclusion

We’ve withdrawn from several over the years here in El Paso. I pray daily for God to be longsuffering with ALL of them. Could they all come back? I don’t know that answer. Much would have to be studied in each case. Yet, we ought to always have our minds ready that if they would desire restoration, we should exhaust all Scriptural efforts to help them be restored.