

SINNING AGAINST THE BODY OF CHRIST (continued) - Malachi 2:10 - "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

We laid down two easily overlooked principles regarding the way God's people make their approach to Him in worship. The first was the idea that we must approach God on *His* terms, not on *ours*. The myth so commonly assumed to be true is that because worship is a matter of sincerity of *heart* we can *perform* that worship in whatever manner is most comfortable to *us*. And that doesn't follow at all. True, worship must come from a sincere heart. And the way we can *tell* our hearts are sincere, rather than self-centered, is we will be very, very, very careful that we are *obedient* worshippers, not just *well-intended* worshippers.

The second principle was the fact that our worship of God is a *communal* worship in the sense that when I am careless and negligent in my relationship with a brother or sister in Christ, more is at stake than just *that* relationship. When I depart from grace in my treatment of *you* I also shut out the grace I need to *receive* for continued fellowship with Christ.

2) I want to look at: the CREATION of a PEOPLE, the PROCESS of GROWTH, and the PATHWAY to DELIVERANCE.

- a) **The creation of a people - Ephesians 4:1-6 - "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."**

This passage is not given primarily as a test of *orthodoxy*. It's given as an incentive to *unity*. Paul tells us that in the third verse - *"...maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace..."* Notice, they don't *create* the unity. You can't manufacture this by coffee and doughnuts in the gym or by taking all the denominational labels from our churches. You can't create this unity by all the churches meeting together in a large ecumenical gathering. *People* can't manufacture the kind of unity Paul's describing. It's the unity of the *Spirit*. It comes from the inward work of genuine redemption and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

But people can *"maintain"* this unity. And the rest of this text offers *incentives*. Notice the way Paul reminds the church that they have *"one Lord"*(4:5). Paul is not stating that fact because he's worried that some people might believe in more than one Jesus. He's thinking about *unity* and how it can be *maintained*. He's reminding these Christians that there will be times when they are *wronged* by a brother or sister in the church. And he's reminding them that, especially at those times, *I'm* not my brother's Lord. *Jesus* is my brother's Lord. And I can relax and *let* Jesus be my brother's Lord.

Paul says the very same thing again in Romans 14:4 - *"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand."* The next time somebody feels the urge to *"share"* a concern with you, or *"help you to pray more intelligently"* about a situation, or *works the telephones during the week*, you need to just gently smile and say, "I'm sorry, but I think you have me confused with Jesus. There's only one Lord and each person must stand or fall before Him."

Next, Paul says there is *"one faith, one baptism"*(4:5) We all enter this Christian walk the same way. The reminder here is faith is the opposite of works. The whole Christian faith is a response to *great grace*. And *baptism* shows that my *participation* in the death and life of Jesus Christ isn't just a *doctrine* or abstract *creed* I can hold to mentally while living my own life on my terms. I've bought into a *life under Lordship*. And I rely every breath on His grace and forgiveness and undeserved mercy.

- b) **The process of growth - 1 Peter 2:1-3 - "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. [2] Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation— [3] if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."**

Notice that last phrase - *"...if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."* How is one to know that great big *"if?"* What are the signs of conversion? Of course, the passage begins with a warning against sin. But take note. It's a warning against one particular *kind* of sin. Look again at that first verse - *"So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander."* These are specifically *relational* sins. And most of them are *attitudinal* sins. That's why Peter puts *"deceit"* and *"hypocrisy"* right in the middle of that list. These are easy to *hide* sins. You can keep all the outward mimicking of church life going and no one will ever know what's crouching and lurking in your heart.

In other words, there are certain sins that not only establish your heart with *guilt* before God but cement the mind against *repentance*. Certain sins are like certain sicknesses. There's an attack of appendicitis. The sting and pain is felt in the rest of the body - the sickness is diagnosed - the appendix is removed - the body heals - and life goes on. Other sins, like other sicknesses, remove the body's ability to sustain itself. AIDS would be a classic example of this today. Anorexia would be another. It's not just a case of removing the inflamed organ or cutting out the tumor. These sicknesses destroy the body's ability to sustain and nourish itself. They make the body its own worst enemy.

This is probably why Peter says we must come to God's Word like *"newborn infants"*(2). My newborn grandson has never slandered anyone. As far as I can tell, he's never spread any gossip about anyone. I think he's been angry a few times, but there's nothing hypocritical about him. Feed him and he has no malice whatsoever.

"There," Peter says. "Come to the Word of God like that." You can fail miserably before the Lord, like David - lust - commit adultery - murder - and still find hope and restoration before God. But when you begin to *mentally calculate against a brother* - when bitterness or ill-will or slander sets in - and no one else knows because no one else sees my heart - the sin is invisible to the rest of the body - then something seals my heart against the very grace that would free and cleanse and forgive my sin.

- c) **The pathway to deliverance - Matthew 18:21-35 - "Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" [22] Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. [23] Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. [24] When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. [25] And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. [26] So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' [27] And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. [28] But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' [29] So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' [30] He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. [31] When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they**

were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.[32] Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. [33] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' [34] And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. [35] So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Don't just dance quickly past those important words in **verse 23** - "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...." That doesn't just mean, "Here's a churchy idea" or "Here's something about religion." Those words mean Jesus is going to say something about: a) *How God rules our lives*. b) *How He had created our real, daily lives to function*. And c) *How joy and peace and the power of the Holy Spirit enter our ordinary situations*.

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...." Those words always mean Jesus is going to try to set us straight about richness of life. They mean He's going to undo some common misconceptions about what's best for us. And here is the principle of this parable:

Peace of heart, mind, and body can only be enjoyed when God's forgiveness is transmitted *through* us as fully as it has been given *to* us. In other words, Jesus is trying to explain to us how our lives get bogged down and imprisoned *after* we've received His delivering grace.

Don't miss the message of **verses 32-34** - "Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. [33] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' [34] And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt."

Ungraciousness of heart puts your soul back in the prison Jesus' saving grace brought you out of. Think of it! A man who was forgiven everything is back making payments for the rest of his life. Never let another person ruin your life by making you hate him.

- 3) **CONCLUSION - Malachi 2:10** - "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" God says to Malachi - "Tell the people that when they deal faithlessly with brother or sister, *they are dealing faithlessly with Me*." If you can keep your *worship* of God obedient and sincere, and if you can keep your *relationships* with others gracious and undefensive, you will have eliminated 90 percent of your spiritual downfalls.