

Believers Sinning Against Others

When we see others that we think are sinning, the human tendency is just to gossip.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:1-2).

Restoring a person means patiently talking to him and helping him out of his sin. The best person to do this is often one who has already had and overcome that particular sin. This is why Paul cautions the helper not to get involved with the sin. This can be a particular problem with alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. If I cannot help the person with a particular sin, I might know somebody else who can, but it should not be my mission just to tell others about it unless they are clearly endangered by it.

It is also important to realize that the Bible gives believers **no commission to go searching for sins in others**. If another believer has been secretly involved in some sin, and has been delivered from it by the power of Christ, there is no need to find it out or dig it up:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1Pet 4:8).

Flagrant Sins Known to the Public

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? (1Cor 5:1-2).

When someone brings a bad reputation upon a congregation because of their open and known sin, they should be asked to leave until the problem is resolved. If I continue to be a member of a congregation (or club, choir, or other Christian group) that does nothing about someone who is sinning terribly, it says to others that "sin does not matter". (Sins in secret may be

every bit as sinful, but at least they do not have such a big effect upon others.)

Leaders in a Congregation

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) (1Tim 3:2-5).

The rest of this chapter and Titus 1 give more standards for leaders—most having to do with personal conduct. God's way of life should be taught because it is good and because it works. God wants his way taught by those who live it, not by slick salesmen who can make it sound good, but who do not have it in their hearts. God sometimes sends us corrupt leaders to test us to see if we will follow God or men (Deut 13:1-3; 2Cor 11:13-15; 1Jn 4:1; Rev 2:2). I should not "go along with the crowd", but follow God.

Watch My Own Sins First

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2Cor 5:10).

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SINOTH01

What Should I Do About the Sins of Others?

If you ask the above question to 10 Bible students, you might get 10 different answers. They might say "turn the other cheek", "forgive them", "tell them to repent", "apply just judgment", "stay away from them", "worry about your own sin", etc. All of these answers and more occur in the Bible.

What I should do about the sins of others varies based on the nature of the sin, who is sinning, who they are sinning against, their relationship to me, and who knows about it. Does that mean that God is unfair and biased in the way He treats people who sin? No!

"...The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1Sam 16:7).

God treats people fairly. He knows our intents and has the power and capacity to deal with all sins of all people. He understands what is best for people in the long term whereas we usually do not. It is because of **our limited capacity** that we must deal differently with different people in different situations. In setting up His laws for humans dealing with the sins of others, God had to limit the amount of damage that could be done if we falsely accuse another of sin.

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Sins That Don't Concern Us

Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own (Prov 26:17).

If I see one person sinning against another, in a place for which I am not responsible, I should leave them alone. As an example, suppose I see two people violently fighting, but they see me and neither wants my help, and they are not on my property, I should not get involved. Neither should I go about talking about this to others, as I do not know the situation and whether it has been resolved, who has repented, etc.

Do not go about spreading slander among your people... (Lev 19:16).

There are circumstances where I should decide to speak up: To continue the previous example, suppose that a good friend of mine tells me that they are considering getting a new room-mate or beginning to date someone and it turns out to be one of the two fighters described above. It might be good to let the friend know. I personally know of a case where a woman dated and then married a man who had committed a violent crime. A close friend of hers had been an eye-witness to the aftermath, but thought it was not her place to tell the woman. After two children and a failed marriage, the friend finally told her—much too late.

A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (Prov 25:11).

Sins Against Me by an Unbeliever

If a person sinned against me in Old Testament times, I would take it to the judges appointed in the land:

This article is written in the first person (using "I" and "me") because the scriptures apply to me, a believer in Christ. They also apply to you, and every other believer. This also provides for clarity, and makes the message personal as you read it to yourself.

Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly (Deut 16:18).

The two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time (Deut 19:17).

If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured (Lev 24:19-20).

The death penalty was commanded for murder, rape, kidnapping, and other serious crimes. However, except for murders, a criminal was permitted to pay a ransom to the victim, rather than suffer an injury to himself (Ex 21:22, 29-30, Num 35:31). It was up to the victim and the judges to determine how much it would be, but it had to be proportional to the crime.

In the New Testament, Christ taught that crimes should not be viewed as an opportunity to collect judgments, but a chance to show love to troubled people:

But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt 5:39-45).

It was the attitude of believing victims that Christ hoped to change. Governments were still intended to punish criminals (Rom 13:1-3)

Sins Against Me by Other Brethren

If your brother sins against you, [1] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. [2] But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." [3] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matt 18:15-17).

Using this three-step formula would save many heart-aches among believers. Only very rarely are all three steps necessary. If another believer has done something **to me** that I think is wrong, I should talk to him first. If I say "he would not listen", it might be that the matter is too trivial--in which case I should let it pass and not complain to others about it. If the matter is worth talking about, I should have the courage to go. When the person realizes that if he does not listen I will ask him to talk to two or three other mature believers about it, he will probably desire to solve it before more people are involved. The final step is taking to "the church" which could be a local congregation, study group, or any other group of believers. While I should never judge another's eternal destiny (Matt 7:1-2, Rom 14:10-13; 1Cor 4:5), I should be willing to help judge current disputes for other believers so they can avoid the courts of unbelievers:

If any of you [believers] has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

This method works for situations as simple as a believer who will not say "hello" to me. They also work when someone has defrauded me in business, is teaching false doctrine, etc. They can also be applied when someone sins against people who I am responsible for—children and others who cannot do it themselves.

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