

An Approved Church Pursues Purity 10-27-19 AM

Revelation 2 and 3 tell us of an inspection by Jesus of seven churches in Asia. Two of these churches have a serious problem:

Pergamum: *But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam - Revelation 2:14*

Thyatira: *But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel - Revelation 2:20*

The problems of these two churches might be summed up as being a problem with false doctrine (the doctrine of Balaam) and false brethren (the Jezebel sister). Both of these problems are also found in one church, the church of Christ in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 Paul tells the Corinthians that they are tolerating doctrinal divisions. He says that the solution is a unity of doctrine. Later he tells them in 1 Corinthians 5:4-7 that by tolerating a brother living in sin, they are in error. The solution to this is an action by the church (discipline).

Paul summarizes his concerns in 2 Corinthians 11:2 when he says *"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin."* Paul's concern is like that of a man who has been charged with bringing a bride to a wedding; he wants to do this without any blemish, as we are told in Ephesians 5:25-27 that Christ's bride must be,

All of this points to the idea of purity. In the church, purity is in two parts: a purity of doctrine, and a purity of brethren/membership. Purity is an important purpose that an approved church must pursue.

What is doctrinal purity? We might begin by saying that it is when a church does not go beyond Scriptures (1 Corinthians 4:6). We know that Scriptures are the exclusive source of authority (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Timothy 3:15), and we act like it. In the other direction, we do not come short of what is taught either (Acts 20:27). We can neither add to nor take away from the Word as our guide (Revelation 22:18-19).

In this vein we are not permitted to accept those (as teachers) who do not teach the whole counsel of God. We are not to accept divisive teachers (Romans 16:17). Indeed, the book of 2 John in particular makes it clear that if a teacher comes and they are not in total agreement on the doctrine of Christ, we cannot accept them (2 John 9-11).

What is congregational purity? Obviously, as humans we often struggle to be faithful, and we cannot expect that every member of the local church is perfect. But we must pursue a purity of members by the authority given. That begins with teaching the truth (2 Timothy 4:2-3). The first principle of discipline: is knowledge (2 Peter 1:5-6). This knowledge includes an understanding that allows for wise judgment in discerning who needs to be discipline and who needs to be encouraged (Jude 22-23). Wisdom is discerning rebellion from ignorance, and patiently teaching those in error.

But there comes a time when some will not listen, and then the church must admonish the unruly (1 Thessalonians 5:14). This requires both patience and firmness (2 Timothy 2:25). Finally, when admonition does not work, we must reject the unrepentant (2 Thessalonians 3:14). This means a withdrawal by the body as commanded in places such as 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

Unfortunately, many churches may sacrifice purity in order to pursue other purposes. They may sacrifice purity for worship; they seek a more exciting worship and leave the doctrine of Christ to obtain it. They

may sacrifice purity for evangelism, lowering the standards of obedience to obtain greater numbers. Perhaps they sacrifice purity for organization, putting together elders or deacons or evangelists who are not called to that purpose by the Word of God. When such sacrifices are made, the irony is that we not only lose our purity, but often the very works that purity is sacrificed to obtain as well.

What happens when purity is lost? We need to understand that purity is our appeal to God. In fact, His glory is found in purity. Again, consider the image of the church as a bride; her purity is how *“He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:26-27). That glory is found in purity. If we should lose our p[purity, would Jesus want us?