

CUTTING PEOPLE OUT OF OUR LIVES

FROM THE KINGDOM LEADERSHIP SERIES

BY ALAN DRAKE

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From the Kingdom Leadership Series

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CUTTING PEOPLE OUT OF OUR LIVES

One of my good Ukrainian friends challenged me (in a good way) about a statement that I made in my last newsletter. I wish that would happen more often because when my writings are challenged, it forces me to examine what I've written more closely and either verify that it is true or correct it. That not only makes me a better writer, but it leads me closer to the Truth. This helps to bring all of us into "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" that will one day become a reality for the entire Body of Christ, as it is written in Ephesians 4:13.

The statement I made in my last newsletter was that "Jesus, who is our ultimate role model, never cut anyone off."

What I was referring to was the ungodly practice of some members in the Body of Christ to permanently cut off communication and end relationships with people because they have personal conflicts with those people, either because there are personality clashes or offenses or disagreements or they just find those people difficult to deal with. How can one member of the Body of Christ cut off another member of the same Body?

"But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"—1 Corinthians 12:20–21 (NASB)

How can we be involved in cutting off relationships with people when we are called to the ministry of reconciliation?

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation"—2 Corinthians 5:18 (NKJV)

"...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."—2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV)

Not only that, but we are commanded to forgive those who offend us... even our enemies, just as Jesus forgave His enemies at the very moment they were crucifying Him! (Luke 23:34)

WHEN IS IT RIGHT TO CUT OFF RELATIONSHIPS?

My friend reminded me that there is a Biblical basis for cutting someone off, but we both agreed that it cannot be for any of the reasons mentioned above, but only for refusal to repent of sins. There is certainly a process for cutting believers off from fellowship if they refuse to repent of their sins... and this is only for believers. This same process is not to be used for cutting off people outside of the Church. The process is found in Matthew 18:15-17 (NIRV):

“If your brother sins against you, go to him. Tell him what he did wrong. Keep it between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won him back. But what if he won’t listen to you? Then take one or two others with you. Scripture says, ‘Every matter must be proved by the words of two or three witnesses.’ (Deuteronomy 19:15) But what if he also refuses to listen to the witnesses? Then tell it to the church. And what if he refuses to listen even to the church? Then don’t treat him as your brother. Treat him as you would treat an ungodly person or a tax collector.”

Paul had to put this into practice in the Corinthian church when a situation arose in which a member of the church was involved in an immoral relationship with his own step-mother (1 Corinthians 5:1). This was Paul’s stand on the issue:

“For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”—1 Corinthians 5:3-5 (NASB)

“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”—1 Corinthians 5:12-13 (NASB)

So that church member was removed and cut off from fellowship with the other members. When he later repented and expressed sorrow for his actions, it proved that the discipline imposed upon him by the church was the most appropriate and effective response to that particular situation, in which a believer was living in unrepentant sin. Paul then admonished the church to welcome the man back into their fellowship without reservation, lest bitterness enter in and take root.

“Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”—2 Corinthians 2:6-11 (NASB)

Ironical as it may seem to some, there is no allowance for cutting ourselves off from unbelievers; only from believers who refuse to repent. Of course, we’re not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, and we’re not to participate with them in any kind of wrong activities; and there is certainly a need for appropriate guidelines and boundaries. For example, we are cautioned not to befriend angry men (Proverbs 22:24) and not to keep company with fools (Proverbs 13:20); but Paul makes it clear that there is no practical way to cut ourselves off from immoral unbelievers, because we’d have to leave the world to do that. Rather he admonished us to cut ourselves off from believers who refuse to repent. He laid all this out for us in 1 Corinthians 5:

“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you

would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”—1 Corinthians 5:9–11 (NASB)

WHY ISN'T THIS DONE TODAY?

At the time that Paul intervened to bring correction for the immorality in the Corinthian church, he scolded them for not dealing with that situation with firm discipline according to the clear guidelines Jesus gave in Matthew 18.

“You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.”—1 Corinthians 5:2 (NASB)

“Your boasting is not good.”—1 Corinthians 5:6 (NASB)

If the Apostle Paul came to almost any of our churches today, he would likely be justified in scolding us in the same way. Immorality is common among church members today. Some might say that immorality is rampant among believers—and even among leaders of the Church. Sadly, we are no longer shocked when even a respected Christian leader is publicly exposed for being involved in immoral relationships.

Why does this happen? How did the Church sink to this level of impurity?

Part of the explanation is that we do not consistently or correctly administer the required discipline that Jesus commanded in Matthew 18:15–17. The example that Paul gave us in dealing with the Corinthian church seems to have been forgotten or rejected by most modern church leaders. We have chosen tolerance and compromise over holiness and purity. We have forgotten the warning of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians:

“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened.”—1 Corinthians 5:6–8 (NASB)

Paul warned the Corinthians that if they tolerated sin in their midst, it would be like leaven (yeast) in dough, growing and spreading throughout the body of believers. This is our condition today in the Body of Christ, and that is how we got to this place – by tolerating and compromising with sin, rather than uniting to confront and eradicate it.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

So, what is the answer? What is needed to restore uncompromising purity and holiness to the Church? Where are the leaders, like Paul, who will hold the Church to the holy standards that Jesus commanded?

In order to bring about a return to purity and holiness in the Body of Christ on earth, we must have leaders with the courage to stand for righteousness, purity, integrity and holiness without compromise. When sin is brought to the attention of the leaders, it must be addressed promptly, consistently, and without partiality. When that facet of leadership is in place, then we will experience separation, but it will be holy separation unto God, not the kind of separation from people that is based in offenses, disagreements and personality conflicts.

“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch anything that is not pure and ‘clean.’ Then I will receive you. And, I will be your Father. You will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord who rules over all.”—2 Corinthians 6:17–18 (NIRV)

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