

*** w97 8/15 26-30 Why Report What Is Bad? ***

Why Report What Is Bad?

HE WHO brings a matter out in the open becomes an enemy of the people, some say in West Africa. That was what happened to Olu when he accused his older brother of committing incest with his sister. You are a liar! screamed the brother. He then viciously beat Olu, drove him from the family house, and burned all Olu's clothes. The villagers supported the brother. No longer welcome in the village, Olu had to leave. Only after the girl was observed to be pregnant did the people realize that Olu had told the truth. The brother confessed, and Olu was restored to favor. Things could have turned out quite differently. Olu could have been killed.

Clearly, those who have no love for Jehovah are not likely to appreciate having their error brought to light. The sinful human tendency is to resist reproof and resent whoever gives it. (Compare John 7:7.) Little wonder that many are as silent as stones when it comes to revealing the wrongs of others to those who have the authority to correct them.

Appreciating the Value of Reproof

Among Jehovah's people, however, there is a different attitude toward reproof. Godly men and women deeply appreciate the arrangement Jehovah has made to help erring ones inside the Christian congregation. They recognize such discipline as an expression of his loving-kindness. Hebrews 12:6-11.

This may be illustrated with an incident in the life of King David. Although he was a righteous man from his youth on, there came a time when he fell into serious wrongdoing. First, he committed adultery. Then, in an attempt to cover up his wrong, he arranged to have the woman's husband killed. But Jehovah revealed David's sin to Nathan the prophet, who courageously confronted David about the matter. Using a powerful illustration, Nathan asked David what should be done to a rich man who had many sheep but took and slaughtered the only lamb, a treasured pet, of a poor man to entertain his friend. David, a former shepherd, was roused to indignation and anger. He said: The man doing this deserves to die! Nathan then applied the illustration to David, saying: You yourself are the man! Samuel 12:1-7.

David did not become angry with Nathan; neither did he try to defend himself nor did he resort to recriminations. Instead, Nathan's rebuke deeply moved his conscience. Cut to the heart, David confessed: I have sinned against Jehovah. Samuel 12:13.

Nathan's exposure of David's sin, followed by godly reproof, bore good results. Though David was not shielded from the consequences of his wrong, he repented and became reconciled to Jehovah. How did David feel about such reproof? He wrote: Should the righteous one strike me, it would be a loving-kindness; and should he reprove me, it would be oil upon the head, which my head would not want to refuse. Psalm 141:5.

In our day too, Jehovah's servants can become involved in serious wrongdoing, even those who have been faithful for many years. Recognizing that the elders can assist, most take the initiative to approach them for help. (James 5:13-16) But sometimes a wrongdoer may try to cover up his sin, as did King David. What should we do if we come to know about serious wrongdoing in the congregation?

Whose Responsibility Is It?

When elders learn about serious wrongdoing, they approach the individual involved to give needed help and correction. It is the elders' responsibility to judge such ones inside the Christian congregation. Keeping a close watch on its spiritual condition, they assist and admonish anyone who is taking an unwise or wrong step. 1 Corinthians 5:12, 13; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 5:1, 2.

But what if you are not an elder and you come to know about some serious wrongdoing on the part of another Christian? Guidelines are found in the Law that Jehovah gave to the nation of Israel. The Law stated that if a person was a witness to apostate acts, sedition, murder, or certain other serious crimes, it was his responsibility to report it and to testify to what he knew. Leviticus 5:1 states: Now in case a soul sins in that he has heard public cursing and he is a witness or he has seen it or has come to know of it, if he does not report it, then he must answer for his error. Compare Deuteronomy 13:6-8; Esther 6:2; Proverbs 29:24.

Though not under the Mosaic Law, Christians today can be guided by the principles behind it. (Psalm 19:7, 8) So if you learn about the serious wrongdoing of a fellow Christian, what should you do?

Handling the Matter

First of all, it is important that there is valid reason to believe that serious wrongdoing has really occurred. Do not become a witness against your fellowman without grounds, stated the wise man. Then you would have to be foolish with your lips. Proverbs 24:28.

You may decide to go directly to the elders. It is not wrong to do so. Usually, however, the most loving course is to approach the person involved. Perhaps the facts are not as they appear to be. Or perhaps the situation is already being handled by the elders. Calmly discuss the matter with the person. If there remains reason to believe that a serious wrong has been committed, encourage him or her to approach the elders for help, and explain the wisdom of doing so. Do not talk to others about the matter, for that would be gossip.

If the person does not report to the elders within a reasonable period of time, then you should. One or two elders will then discuss the matter with the accused. The elders need to search and investigate and inquire thoroughly to see if wrong has been done. If it has, they will handle the case according to Scriptural guidelines. Deuteronomy 13:12-14.

At least two witnesses are required to establish a charge of wrongdoing. (John 8:17; Hebrews 10:28) If the person denies the charge and your testimony is the only one, the matter will be left in Jehovah's hands. (1 Timothy 5:19, 24, 25) This is done in the knowledge that all things are openly exposed to Jehovah and that if the person is guilty, eventually his sins will catch up with him. Hebrews 4:13; Numbers 32:23.

But suppose the person does deny the charge and you are the only witness against him. Could you now be open to a countercharge of slander? No, not unless you have gossiped to those not involved in the matter. It is not slanderous to report conditions affecting a congregation to those having authority and responsibility to oversee and correct matters. It is, in fact, in line with our desire always to do what is correct and loyal. Compare Luke 1:74, 75.

Maintaining Holiness in the Congregation

One reason for reporting wrongdoing is that it works to preserve the cleanness of the congregation. Jehovah is a clean God, a holy God. He requires all those who worship him to be spiritually and morally clean. His inspired Word admonishes: As obedient children, quit being fashioned according to the desires you formerly had in your ignorance, but, in accord with the Holy One who called you, do you also become holy yourselves in all your conduct, because it is written: You must be holy, because I am holy. (1 Peter 1:14-16) Individuals who practice uncleanness or wrongdoing can bring defilement and Jehovah's disfavor upon an entire congregation unless action is taken to correct or remove them. Compare Joshua, chapter 7.

The apostle Paul's letters to the Christian congregation at Corinth show how the reporting of wrongdoing worked toward the cleansing of God's people there. In his first letter, Paul wrote: Actually fornication is reported among you, and such fornication as is not even among the nations, that a wife a certain man has of his father. 1 Corinthians 5:1.

The Bible does not tell us from whom the apostle received this report. It may be that Paul learned about the situation from Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who had traveled from Corinth to Ephesus where Paul was staying. Paul had also received a letter of inquiry from the Christian congregation in Corinth. Whatever the source, once the situation had been reported to Paul by reliable witnesses, he was then able to give direction on the matter. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves, he wrote. The man was expelled from the congregation. 1 Corinthians 5:13; 16:17, 18.

Did Paul's instruction bring good results? Indeed it did! Evidently, the wrongdoer came to his senses. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul urged that the congregation kindly forgive and comfort the repentant man. (2 Corinthians 2:6-8) Thus the reporting of wrongdoing led to action that resulted in cleansing the congregation and restoring to God's favor a person who had damaged his relationship with God.

We find another example in Paul's first letter to the Christian congregation at Corinth. This time the apostle names the witnesses who reported the matter. He wrote: The disclosure was made to me about you, my brothers, by those of the house of Chloe, that dissensions exist among you. (1 Corinthians 1:11) Paul knew that this dissension, along with giving undue honor to men, had created a sectarian attitude that threatened to destroy the congregation's unity. Hence, out of deep regard for the spiritual welfare of his fellow believers there, Paul acted quickly and wrote corrective counsel to the congregation.

Today, the vast majority of brothers and sisters in congregations throughout the earth work hard to preserve the spiritual cleanness of the congregation by individually maintaining an approved standing before God. Some suffer to do so; others have even died in order to keep integrity. Surely to condone or cover up wrongdoing would show a lack of appreciation for these efforts.

Help for Erring Ones

Why do some who have fallen into gross sin hold back from approaching the congregation elders? Often it is because they are not aware of the benefits of going to the elders. Some incorrectly believe that if they confess, their sin will be exposed to the entire congregation. Others delude themselves as to the gravity of their course. Still others think they can readjust themselves without the aid of the elders.

But such wrongdoers need loving help from the congregation elders. James wrote: *Is there anyone sick among you? Let him call the older men of the congregation to him, and let them pray over him, greasing him with oil in the name of Jehovah. And the prayer of faith will make the indisposed one well, and Jehovah will raise him up. Also, if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.* James 5:14, 15.

What a wonderful provision to help erring ones to restore their spirituality! By applying soothing counsel from God's Word and by praying in their behalf, the elders can help the spiritually ailing ones to recover from their erroneous ways. Thus, rather than feeling condemned, repentant ones often feel refreshed and relieved when they meet with loving elders. A young West African man had committed fornication and had covered his sin for some months. After his sin became manifest, he said to the elders: *How I wish someone would have asked about my involvement with that girl! It's such a relief to bring this thing into the open.* Compare Psalm 32:3-5.

An Act of Principled Love

Baptized servants of God have passed over from death to life. (1 John 3:14) But if they commit serious sin, they have turned back to the way of death. If they are not helped, they may become hardened in wrongdoing, not desiring to repent and return to the worship of the true God. Hebrews 10:26-29.

The reporting of wrongdoing is an act of genuine concern for the wrongdoer. James wrote: *My brothers, if anyone among you is misled from the truth and another turns him back, know that he who turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.* James 5:19, 20.

So, then, why report what is bad? Because it works what is good. Really, to report wrongdoing is an act of Christian principled love shown toward God, toward the congregation, and toward the wrongdoer. As each member of the congregation loyally upholds God's righteous standards, Jehovah will richly bless the congregation as a whole. Wrote the apostle Paul: *He [Jehovah] will also make you firm to the end, that you may be open to no accusation in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 1:8.

[Picture on page 26]

It shows love to encourage an erring Witness to speak with the elders

[Picture on page 28]

Elders help restore erring ones to God's favor

***** it-1 788 Expelling *****

Some of the offenses that could merit disfellowshipping from the Christian congregation are fornication, adultery, homosexuality, greed, extortion, thievery, lying, drunkenness, reviling, spiritism, murder, idolatry, apostasy, and the causing of divisions in the congregation. (1Co 5:9-13; 6:9, 10; Tit 3:10, 11; Re 21:8) Mercifully, one promoting a sect is warned a first and a second time before such disfellowshipping action is taken against him. **In the Christian congregation, the principle enunciated in the Law applies, namely, that two or three witnesses must establish evidence against the accused one.** (1Ti 5:19) Those who have been convicted of a practice of sin are reproved Scripturally before the onlookers, for example, those who testified concerning the sinful conduct, so that they too may all have a healthy fear of such sin. 1Ti 5:20; see REPROOF.

The Christian congregation is also admonished by Scripture to stop socializing with those who are disorderly and not walking correctly but who are not deemed deserving of complete expulsion. Paul wrote the Thessalonian congregation concerning such: *Stop associating with him, that he may become ashamed. And yet do not be considering him as an enemy, but continue admonishing him as a brother.* 2Th 3:6, 11, 13-15.

***** it-2 234 Legal Case *****

Evidence. If a person was a witness to apostate acts, sedition, murder, which defiled the land, or certain other serious crimes, he was under obligation to report it and to testify to what he knew, or he would be subject to divine curse, publicly proclaimed. (Le 5:1; De 13:8; compare Pr 29:24; Es 6:2.) **One witness was not enough to establish a matter, however. Two or more were required.** (Nu 35:30; De 17:6; 19:15; compare Joh 8:17, 18; 1Ti 5:19; Heb 10:28.) Witnesses were commanded by the Law to speak the truth (Ex 20:16; 23:7), and were, in some cases, put under oath. (Mt 26:63) This would especially be so when the one on whom suspicion fell was the only witness to the matter. (Ex 22:10, 11) Since those in a legal case before the judges or at the sanctuary for judgment of a matter were regarded as standing before Jehovah, witnesses were to recognize that they were accountable to God. (Ex 22:8; De 1:17; 19:17) A witness was not to accept a bribe, allow anyone wicked to persuade him to speak untruthfully, or scheme violence. (Ex 23:1, 8) He was not to let his testimony be swayed by pressure of a crowd or by the wealth or poverty of those involved in the case. (Ex 23:2, 3) Even the closest family relationship was not to hold one back from

testifying against a wicked violator of the law, such as an apostate or rebellious one. *1/2*De 13:6-11; 21:18-21; Zec 13:3.

***** w87 9/1 12-15 "A Time to Speak"-When? *****

Mary is a hypothetical person facing a situation that some Christians have faced. The way she handles the situation represents how some have applied Bible principles in similar circumstances.

In their *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Keil and Delitzsch state that a person would be guilty of error or sin if he *1/2*knew of another's *1/2*s crime, whether he had seen it, or had come to the certain knowledge of it in any other way, and was therefore qualified to appear in court as a witness for the conviction of the criminal, neglected to do so, and did not state what he had seen or learned, when he heard the solemn adjuration of the judge at the public investigation of the crime, by which all persons present, who knew anything of the matter, were urged to come forward as witnesses. *1/2*

[Picture on page 15]

It is the right and loving course to encourage an erring Witness to speak with the elders, confident that they will handle the problem in a kind and understanding way

***** w85 6/1 19-20 Walk With Confidence in Jehovah's Leadership *****

15 We must not lose sight of the fact that God is directing his organization, although walking with confidence in Jehovah's leadership may not be easy at times. To illustrate: Suppose a brother thinks that he has not been appointed as a ministerial servant or an overseer because the elders have something against him. Instead of reacting in a way that could disturb the congregation's peace, he should remember that Jehovah is directing the theocratic organization. Hence, the brother may seek some explanation in a humble, peaceful manner. (Hebrews 12:14) Then how wise it would be for him to acknowledge any weaknesses called to his attention and prayerfully strive to make improvement! Thereafter, he can leave matters in God's hands, in keeping with the words: *1/2*Throw your burden upon Jehovah himself. *1/2* (Psalm 55:22) In time and as we qualify spiritually, Jehovah is sure to give us plenty to do in his service. *1/2* Compare 1 Corinthians 15:58.

***16* Even if we have suffered some real wrong at the hands of a brother or a sister, would that give us just cause to stop associating with the congregation? Would we thus be justified in ceasing to render sacred service to Jehovah? No, for such a course would be one of unfaithfulness to God and ingratitude for his leadership. It would also indicate that we did not love our loyal fellow believers earth wide. (Matthew 22:36-40; 1 John 4:7, 8) Moreover, if we were to break our integrity to Jehovah, that would give Satan a basis for taunting God's something we surely do not desire! *1/2* Proverbs 27:11.**

17 So, then, let us *1/2*bless Jehovah and never forget all the doings of the One who crowns our life with loving-kindness and mercies. *1/2* (Psalm 103:2-4) If we always remember our loving God and act in harmony with his Word, we will maintain strong confidence in his unfailing leadership. (Proverbs 22:19) To turn away from Jehovah and his organization, to spurn the direction of *1/2*the faithful and discreet slave, *1/2* and to rely simply on personal Bible reading and interpretation is to become like a solitary tree in a parched land. But in contrast, a person whose confidence is in our Great Leader, Jehovah, *1/2* will certainly become like a tree planted by the waters, that sends out its roots right by the watercourse; and he will not see when heat comes, but his foliage will actually prove to be luxuriant. *1/2* Moreover, *1/2* in the year of drought he will not become anxious, nor will he leave off from producing fruit *1/2* to God's glory. (Matthew 24:45-47; Jeremiah 17:8) That can be your blessed experience if you resolutely continue to walk with confidence in Jehovah's leadership.