

Sin, Spiritual Needs, and Godly Care

We live in a time when there is a lot of focus on personal rights—people fighting for equal rights and opportunities. While there are a good many things that can come out of it, there is the problem of it going too far in demanding personal rights—having an attitude of entitlement. They think they have a right to their own way, without interference from others. They do not want anyone to tell them how they should live their lives. I realize this is basic human nature, but it seems like as time progresses this self-serving attitude is more and more prevalent.

None of us are exempt from this temptation, and it can come into our relationship with God and our spiritual brothers and sisters in the Church of God. We may feel like our relationship with God is our personal business and resist any form of encouragement from our brothers and sisters. This brings me to the question that came to my mind.

When we consider living a Christian life, what are the differences between spiritual needs and sins? If someone has a spiritual need, are they living in sin? What are spiritual needs? What does the Bible tell us—does God, or do my spiritual brothers and sisters have a responsibility for my life in areas that are not outright sin?

14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. 15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. 1 Corinthians 4:14-16

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. John 15:2

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. Acts 20:31

These verses came to me, as I was considering what the Bible may say about the topic. If we consider the depth of these verses, we can see they indicate more than just reproving sin—there is spiritual care, warning, purging, and the care of the heart of a father.

My mind is drawn in particular to a father's heart. The heart of a true faithful father, gently, guides and corrects his children. He sees and understands how current behaviors may cause his child trouble in the future. When he corrects, it is not necessarily because of wrongdoing, but because his love compels him to teach and warn his child of danger, so they do not get hurt. In a spiritual sense—so they will not fall into sin. When the need arises for correction or encouragement, he does not begin by rebuking his child with harsh or strong words. He knows that doing so, in most cases, strikes fear, and will make his child afraid of him—the opposite of what he wants. He desires the best for his child, and will warn and if necessary, use disciplinary measures to bring it about. His correction depends on the age of the child, and the father knows how to correct in age-appropriate measures.

I guess the point I am trying to make is that correction is not always because of sin. If I can have that in my heart, then I can better understand how we should help people and be helped.

If I were driving my car down the road, and another motorist noticed that my wheel was wobbling, most likely they would try to get my attention to let me know before it fell off and caused me to have an accident. This is the role that the church of God plays in the life of her members. She is there to warn and to teach about sin, so that we can safely navigate the pitfalls of sin.

The Church of God is made up of imperfect humans, trying to understand the Holy Spirit of God. Because my brothers and sisters are human, their care may not always be in the way that we think it should be. They may make errors and mistakes—even being critical, but that does not mean they are not God’s faithful children.

We get used to the feel and sound of our car on the roadway and are quick to pick up something unusual. An unusual sound, or vibration may indicate that there is a problem. We may try to determine if it is the road we are driving on or if there is indeed a problem with the car. We may speed up a bit, slow down, or change lanes, all in an effort to diagnose the issue. At this point we are still driving, and everything is functioning normally. If the problem continues, we get concerned and may take our car to a mechanic to have them check it out. The problem may not be a visible one, but an experienced technician can sometimes diagnose it without seeing what the problem is.

This reminds me of a time our car started making a growling noise from one of the back wheels. When we took it to the auto mechanic, they found out that a wheel bearing was going bad. Our car was a German model that we had imported to Russia, so they did not immediately have the correct parts. We continued to drive it for a short time, but it rapidly got worse, and I suppose the wheel would eventually have fallen off. Although I did not know what that problem was, the service mechanic did.

A sound can be misdiagnosed on a car, or it may take trial and error before the proper diagnosis is found. Now that I know what a wheel bearing going out sounds like, I become suspicious of unfamiliar noises coming from the car. Because I have had that experience, I may incorrectly assume a similar noise indicates the same thing, when in fact it could be something entirely different.

These examples we have been discussing, have parallels to our Christian experience. Our brothers and sisters may see or hear something in our lives that does not sound right and makes them concerned for us. They may not know exactly what the problem is, but the symptoms show that something is not quite right. They may also compare symptoms, so their diagnosis may not always be correct, but that does not mean a problem does not exist. Initially what they perceive may not be a sin to be repented of, but it could eventually take us away from God. Whatever it is, them coming to us is part of the brotherly care the Church of God has for each other.

Spiritual needs are not necessarily a sin, but they may be the “squeaking wheel” that indicates something could be going wrong.

When we notice something in our brother or sisters’ life that makes us concerned about their spiritual well-being, we have a responsibility to warn them. This should be done in the lowest way possible. The prophet Isaiah, speaking about the gentleness of Jesus, said that a smoking flax will

He not quench. [Isaiah 42:3](#). A smoking flax could very easily be extinguished, so care must be taken when fanning it back to a flame. This is an example of the care of our Lord. His gentle spirit was set to provide understanding and healing to the wounded, helpless, downtrodden, and weak.

If the Lord asks us to speak to our spiritual brother or sister, we should be careful so as not to snuff out the little bit of courage they have. Sharing hearts with them without judgement is the first step to not discouraging them more. By trying to understand the load they are bearing that is causing their spiritual flame to grow faint, we may find that there is more flame there than we thought.

Being our spiritual mother is what the Church is all about. It is to provide a safe place where one needs not fall into sin. It is a place of nurture, love, and care.

I think we do well to be understanding, and careful that we do not judge our brother or sister immediately as sinning, when we see a need in their life. It could be sin, or it could be something that is causing discouragement. They may feel neglected and lonely, like they do not really matter. A bit of interest in them may be the key to making a difference in their life.

In our baptismal vows we promise to exercise spiritual care for our brothers and sisters and to receive the same from them. This is not meant to speak of sins only, but to have a godly loving concern for our spiritual brothers and sisters. This godly concern will motivate our spiritual care for each other.

The Bible tells us that the fruits of our lives will indicate what is going on inside. We understand that to be true. It has also been the temptation to put on outward forms of worship to make us appear more righteous or holy. This is what Jesus saw and rebuked with the leaders in his day. They put on the outward forms of piety, but inside they were taken up with themselves and pride.

It is our human nature to think that having a conservative look, such as a long beard, or a large head covering indicates holiness. By the same token, a short shadow beard, and a small head covering indicate a spiritual need. In many cases a lack of spirituality will show up in a casual appearance—but a large beard or head covering does not necessarily indicate holiness. We have learned that sin can lurk behind that outward facade.

Self-righteousness tends to exaggerate outward appearance to give one the semblance of a close walk with God. That being said, a conservative look is not an indication someone is self-righteous. A consecrated Christian will be careful how they present themselves, which should not be confused with self-righteousness.

Although we do not think of it as such, self-righteousness can be a motivating factor for a casual life and deportment. When we stand aloof, thinking someone or a group is taking things too close, do we not feel we are just as righteous as they are? Is that not self-righteousness?

We do well to be careful when drawing conclusions when looking at the outward. We should not just assume that it is an accurate picture of the inside of the heart.

I am not by any means suggesting that we should not go to our brother or sister with our concerns for their spiritual well-being. Rather, consider that when we see or hear something about our brother or sister, it does not immediately indicate sin in their life. By exercising a non-judgment prayerful approach, it puts us in the way of proper understanding.

A faithful Christian will have spiritual balance which will be visible to others.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. 9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging. 1 Peter 4:8-9

Let us take notice that Peter indicates both charity and hospitality. Charity needs little explanation, but we should consider the role hospitality plays into the Church of God. Hospitality speaks of open-heartedness, and a willingness to give oneself for another's comfort and well-being. It is relational. This is why hospitality is essential in the Church of God. It indicates love, friendship, and community. It fails when there is self-love, pride, or wounds. Hospitality has the same root word as hospital, which is where we go for health and healing. Both hospital and hospitality come from the Latin root-word "hospes," meaning host or guest. This is a natural attribute of the Christian family and can indicate our love for each other. It is something we lose when we become independent of one another. When I do not appreciate or feel the need of my spiritual brothers and sisters, I will not welcome them into my life. On the other hand, Peter must have understood hospitality would take an effort, so he tells us it is something we should practice.

Hospitality does not always automatically happen—it takes an effort on our part to have guests over. It is much easier when we have a comfortable relationship with our guests. In a way, it is like "cause and effect." By practicing hospitality, (whither having guests over or allowing our brothers and sisters into our spiritual lives,) the more we do it the easier it becomes, and the more need we will have of it.

The Church of God is made up of the children of the same Father, so they have a natural, spiritual family bond. Yet it takes hearts full of humility and love to experience this bond in its fullness.

It is normal to have those friends and people we get along with better than others. However, hospitality crosses over lines of friendship and those we feel comfortable with. It is an openness—an approachableness that indicates an open life. This makes for open sharing and fellowship with one another. Part of the family of God.

We may not even realize it, but we may put up walls of self-protection that hinder this fellowship. It could be pride on our part, or it could be past experiences, which cause fear. Although it may not entirely be our fault, it is something that hinders our relationship with others and God may have plans to set us free.

This brings to mind the carefulness and understanding we should have for each other. Some fears are a result of a lack of understanding or compassion, which lays a heavy burden on people when they have to overcome their fears, to feel safe with the brothers and sisters in the Church.

We will not always understand each other's needs the way we should. One person may be oversensitive while others may lack sensitivity. This is all part of being in the human family. Our responsibility is to allow the oil of God's love to flow in and around us, which will minimize friction, and sooth wounded hearts and lives. We will not always get it right. But if our hearts are in tune with the Holy Spirit, and full of God's love, there will always be a way.

Faith, Feathers, & Dust - Jeff Goertzen

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