

257. How is an Excommunicated Person to be Dealt with when He Is Penitent?

Forgive him and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore, I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. 2 Cor. 2, 7. 8.

The severity of the punishment, the excommunication of an unrepentant sinner from a Christian congregation, should convince the offender of the gravity of his offense and remind him of the great final excommunication: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," that he may repent and return. And as Christ received publicans and sinners, the malefactor, and the woman taken in adultery; as Paul urges the church at Corinth to forgive the man who had committed a heinous sin, but who now repented of it; and as there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, – so the Church, too, should gladly forgive one who was excommunicated, but is penitently returning to the fold and restore the former privileges to him. If he confesses his sin to the congregation and promises to amend, the congregation is to receive him as a brother, and the called minister should make public announcement thereof. For excommunication is not intended for the perdition, but for the salvation, of the soul. Excommunication is to lead the impenitent sinner to repentance. He must now constantly think: "What if I should die suddenly? What if the congregation was right when it said: Your sins are bound before God? Will God not say: You have denied Me before men, and now I will also deny thee? The entire congregation would not condemn me if I were a Christian." And, praise be to God! this object is often attained. Frequently such discipline brings the sinning brother to repentance. And when he does repent, the Christian congregation should not be slow to forgive.

The congregation at Corinth had been slow to excommunicate an impenitent fornicator, until it was reprimanded by Paul. And it was slow to forgive when the sinner showed signs of repentance. We should forgive readily. We must not demand a certain period of probation. We should confirm our love to the repentant brother, forgiving and forgetting his sin and impenitence. The world acts differently in such cases. But Christians know: There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; and we believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, this is valid and certain also in heaven.

Prayer.

O Jesus, my precious Savior, be merciful unto me, a sinner, and by virtue of Thy merits remove like a cloud all my transgressions; cast them into the sea of Thine innocent blood that they may never again come to light or before the judgment of God. Keep me from all evil. Curb the wrath and fury of Satan and send Thy heavenly hosts to protect and guard me in all my ways. Preserve me from error in doctrine and life; and if I do go astray, lead me back to Thy fold and ever be my Good Shepherd. I take refuge with Thee and wait upon Thy goodness. Amen.

Jesus, Thou me keep
'Mongst Thy faithful sheep,
Who upon Thy promise live
Bliss eternally to give;
Then my path will be
Through death's night to Thee.

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