



The Sin of Permissiveness

by Gene Easley

"I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah" (Jeremiah 23:14).

Jeremiah cried out against the false prophets. They were living in sin and were permissive toward the sins of others. Jeremiah says of the false prophets, "...they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness..." He then compares the false prophets of his day to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin of permissiveness had been prevalent in Sodom and the surrounding cities. They allowed the people to get by with their sin without reproof. This permissiveness eventually brought destruction to Sodom. And it will bring destruction to any society and will certainly bring God's judgment to any church.

As an example, in 1 Samuel 2-4, we have the story of how Eli, who was both a priest and a judge in Israel, allowed his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to live in open sin and corruption. He warned them of their sin. He told them how bad their deeds were (1 Samuel 2:22-25), but he refused to bring any kind of discipline against them. They defiled the priesthood and took advantage of innocent people, but because they were his sons, Eli just sat back and watched. The end result was that God brought judgment. Both of Eli's sons died in battle the same day.

Hophni and Phinehas not only died because of their sin, but they also occasioned the capture of the Ark of God. The Ark represented the presence of God among His people. This warns us that when we allow open sin in the church, we lose the presence of God from the sanctuary. Upon hearing the news of his sons' deaths and of the capture of the Ark of God, Eli fell backward from the place where he was sitting, broke his neck, and died.

The wife of Phinehas was with child and near her day of delivery. When she heard the news of her husband's death and of Eli's death, she gave birth to her child, and then she also died. Before she died, she named the baby, "Ichabod," which means "The glory has departed."

The sins of Eli's sons, and Eli's permissiveness toward their sin, caused so many innocent people to be defrauded. Many people died in battle. A poor boy had to go through life bearing the name of Ichabod; all because a man would not stand up and administer discipline to his sons when he had warning from God and ample opportunity.

The church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:20-23) knew that Jezebel was teaching and doing things contrary to God's Word, but they would not take a stand against it. As a result, they were strongly rebuked by Christ.

If we do not discipline ourselves and judge ourselves, then we will fall under the judgment of God. Parents who will not discipline their children will often see them disciplined by the hand of the law and the court systems instead. Any church that embraces a permissive spirit will be judged by God eventually.

The church must take away from these verses a big lesson. We cannot turn our backs to the sins in the church and refuse to deal with them. Purity of heart and deeds has to be a focal point of the follower of Christ. It must be something that every local church and its leadership will safeguard with utmost diligence. When we purge ourselves from the impurities of this world, then we can be vessels, "...unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21b).