

Sunday morning we arrived at the church in Lumbadzi. It is a larger congregation that is located by the airport. I was told to preach an hour and a half before the Lord's supper, then two sessions of one hour each in the afternoon, which surprisingly enough in Malawi is exactly what occurred. They were very interested in various problems in the family and wanted me to take the entire day on it.

I started in the morning with a lesson I call "Broadening our Horizons." It is designed to help Christians see the real meaning of *agape*-love is service and sacrifice for others. Jesus left his home in to come to earth and serve by dying for us. We are to have that same mind(Phil 2:1-12). When we apply this to our family as husbands and wives, parents and children, we will have the home God intended. The afternoon sessions were built on this foundation.

Monday and Tuesday were spent teaching in Mponela. They wanted me to take both days and teach on Christian living. Wednesday we planned to leave early and begin preaching in remote villages. A car had been reserved last week, but it had broken down. They finally fixed it and it arrived about 10:00pm Tuesday night. Wednesday morning we loaded the truck, but the battery did not have enough power. By the time we go everything fixed, it was after noon, so we rushed to Chalinda and began teaching. They also wanted a class on Christian living and the family. Since we arrived so late classes were extended until five.

Thursday morning we again tried to start the car and the battery was too weak. There is no electricity in the villages, but some have solar batteries. We took two of them and tied them to the other battery but it was still not enough power. After several hours we gave up and Chimcande let me drive his motorcycle. The road he took was very difficult even for a motorcycle so it took over half an hour to ride four miles. We left the battery on a solar panel, hoping it would be fully charged by Friday morning. Which worked out very well. We arrived on time at Longwe and had three classes. The first on the life of a Christian, then "loving God with all our mind, heart and soul." The last class was again on the family, which was very well received and I received promises from the husbands that when I came back next year they would be better husbands in loving and serving their wives.

I have been addressing another serious problem in the churches of Malawi as often as I can. They have never been taught to practice church discipline. Most congregations speak of their members in one of two ways. First, the number of people they still have on the "role." This is a list of every person who has obeyed the gospel in that village. The second list is the number of members who actually regularly attend the assembly. Often these numbers are 50 to 100 members apart.

I developed a lesson to help them help them understand that it is just as important to tell brethren they are lost and no longer in fellowship with God as it was welcome them into fellowship with God when they obeyed the gospel. It is just as important to try to save them after they sin and return to the world as it was to preach the gospel in the first place to get them out of the world.

When God revealed to Ezekiel that Jerusalem was to be destroyed, God showed him a vision. Ezekiel heard God calling "*those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand.*" Six "men" with battleaxes arrive and while they wait, God commanded a separate "man" "*clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side*" to go "*through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.*" After this, God told those with deadly weapons: "*Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. 6 Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.*" (Ezek 9:1-6).

Only those who "*sigh and cry over the abominations*" would receive the mark that would spare them. These are the righteous who while witnessing blatant sins mourn over the loss of souls and sigh over the rebellion against God. They feel righteous indignation due to their love of God and desire to see his rule extended over all the earth. They feel a sense of frustration that such open rebellion is tolerated.

I then ask them, "If God did this today would you receive this mark?" "What kind of a person are you?" "Do you take pleasure in watching others sin(Rom 1:32), or do you turn away disgusted with these abominations and mourning over the loss of their souls?" This attitude of disgust over the abominations of sin is the only way we can receive the mark of God's approval.

Lot felt the same way while living in Sodom. He was “*greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard)*”(2Pet. 2:7-9). Thus God equated righteousness with the feeling of vexation and distress when he heard them speaking about their sins. I ask again, “Are you be like Lot?” “Would God consider you to be righteous since you feel the same way as Lot?” It is not right for a Christian to be aware of sin and not feel a sense of grief, sorrow, indignation, and distress, along with a desire to help that person repent if possible.

Paul was deeply concerned because the church at Corinth did not have this attitude toward a sinner in their midst. This same sense of sorrow and torment should have led them to act. Paul revealed that he felt the same way as those in Ezekiel’s vision who received the mark and as Lot did while living in Sodom. That lack of this attitude on the part of those living in Corinth let Paul to rebuke them sharply, because this is the “natural affection” Christians are to have toward each other.

*And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1 Cor 5:2-5*

How can any church, filled with people who love God tolerate sin in their midst? The obvious answer: They can’t. Such a thing cannot be done and the church in Corinth must deal with it. The sinner must be shown his wickedness and be forced to repent. They must make every effort to help him destroy his fleshly desires so his spirit can be saved. When a brother sins and we ignore that sin, we are proving we would not receive the mark, are not like Lot, and do not truly love our brother since that sin will cost him his soul.

The same sense of sighing, crying, vexation, torment and distress that God expects his people to feel toward all openly practiced sin in the world must be the same feeling they have toward those in the church. When we witness open sin and there is no repentance, our own natural emotions should take over and we should move to remove that sin hopefully by repentance, but if there is no repentance, Jesus demanded that it still be removed.

*"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Mt. 18:15-17*

Jesus also expected the same attitude toward sin as those in Ezekiel. Every effort must be made either to gain repentance or to make that brother aware that he has severed his relationship with Jesus and must either repent to have it restored, or no longer be considered a Christian, but as a heathen. These are strong words and few enjoy the task, but if we sigh and cry over abominations and if we are tormented by ungodly conduct we must act on it.

Paul told the Thessalonians the same thing. But this time in regard to the sin of ignoring the words of the apostles. As James noted, if we know to do good and don’t so it, it is sin(Jas. 4:18).

*And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 2Th. 3:14-15*

*But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 2Th. 3:6-7*

When we forsake the assembly(Heb 10:23-26), teach false doctrine(Rom 16:17-18), or do any other thing that is not according to the traditions received from the apostles(Mt. 28:18-10), they must be withdrawn from and marked.

No Christian aware of any sin can simply ignore that sin. God made it clear in Ezekiel and through the example

of Lot that our attitude toward sin and our desire to remove it either through repentance or through removing the sinner is proof of our righteousness.