

Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked

JEHOVAH is a holy God. In ancient times he was “the Holy One of Israel,” and as such he demanded that Israel be clean, unsullied. (Psalm 89:18) He told his chosen people: “You must prove yourselves holy, because I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:45) Anyone who wanted to “ascend into the mountain of Jehovah” had to be “innocent in his hands and clean in heart.” (Psalm 24:3, 4) That meant more than merely avoiding sinful acts. It meant “the hating of bad.”—Proverbs 8:13.

Lovingly, Jehovah laid down detailed laws so that the nation of Israel could identify and avoid wrongdoing. (Romans 7:7, 12) These laws included strict guidelines on morality. Adultery, homosexual acts, incestuous relationships, and bestiality were all identified as unholy spiritual pollutants. (Leviticus 18:23; 20:10-17) Those guilty of such degraded acts were cut off from the nation of Israel.

When the congregation of anointed Christians became “the Israel of God,” similar moral standards were laid down for them. (Galatians 6:16) Christians too were to “abhor what is wicked.” (Romans 12:9) Jehovah’s words to Israel also applied to them: “You must be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15, 16) Such unholy practices as fornication, adultery, homosexual acts, bestiality, and incest were not to corrupt the Christian congregation. Those refusing to stop engaging in such things would be excluded from God’s Kingdom. (Romans 1:26, 27; 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Hebrews 13:4) In these “last days,” the same standards apply to the “other sheep.”

(2 Timothy 3:1; John 10:16) As a result, anointed Christians and other sheep make up a clean and wholesome people, able to carry the name of their God as Jehovah’s Witnesses.—Isaiah 43:10.

Keeping the Congregation Clean

In contrast, the world condones all kinds of immorality. Although true Christians are different, they should not forget that many who now serve Jehovah were once in the world. There are many who, before they knew our holy God, saw no reason not to indulge the desires and fantasies of their fallen flesh, wallowing in a “low sink of debauchery.” (1 Peter 4:4) The apostle Paul, after describing the disgusting practices of degraded people of the nations, said: “That is what some of you were.” Still, he went on to say: “But you have been washed clean, but you have been sanctified, but you have been declared righteous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the spirit of our God.”—1 Corinthians 6:11.

What a comforting statement that is! Whatever a person did earlier in life, he changes when the glorious good news about the Christ has an effect on his heart. He exercises faith and dedicates himself to Jehovah God. From then on he lives a morally pure life, washed clean in God’s eyes. (Hebrews 9:14) The sins that he committed previously are pardoned, and he can “stretch forward to the things ahead.”* —Philippians 3:13, 14; Romans 4:7, 8.

* See “Questions From Readers” in the May 1, 1996, issue of *The Watchtower*.

Jehovah forgave repentant David for murder and adultery, and He forgave repentant Manasseh for immoral idolatry and much bloodshed. (2 Samuel 12:9, 13; 2 Chronicles 33:2-6, 10-13) We can be truly grateful that he is prepared to forgive us too if we repent and approach him in sincerity and humility. Still, despite Jehovah's forgiving David and Manasseh, these two men—and Israel with them—had to live with the consequences of their sinful acts. (2 Samuel 12:11, 12; Jeremiah 15:3-5) In a similar way, while Jehovah forgives repentant sinners, there may be consequences of their actions that cannot be avoided.

Inevitable Consequences

For example, a man who lives a life of immoral debauchery and contracts AIDS may accept the truth and turn his life around to the point of dedication and baptism. Now he is a spiritually clean Christian having a relationship with God and a wonderful hope for the future; but he still has AIDS. He may eventually die of the disease, a sad but inescapable consequence of his former conduct. For some Christians the effects of former gross immorality may persist in other ways. For years after their baptism, perhaps for the rest of their lives in this system of things, they may have to fight urges in their flesh to return to their previous immoral life-style. With the help of Jehovah's spirit, many succeed in resisting. But they have to wage a constant battle.—Galatians 5:16, 17.

Such ones do not sin as long as they control their urges. But if they are men, they may wisely decide not to 'reach out' for responsibility in the congregation while still having to struggle with powerful fleshly impulses. (1 Timothy 3:1) Why? Because they know the trust that the congregation puts in the elders. (Isaiah 32:1, 2; Hebrews

13:17) They realize that the elders are consulted on many intimate matters and have to handle sensitive situations. It would be neither loving, wise, nor reasonable for one waging a constant fight with unclean fleshly desires to reach out for such a responsible position.—Proverbs 14:16; John 15:12, 13; Romans 12:1.

For a man who was a child molester before he was baptized, there may be another consequence. When he learns the truth, he repents and turns around, not bringing that cruel sin into the congregation. He may thereafter make fine progress, completely overcome his wrong impulses, and even be inclined to 'reach out' for a responsible position in the congregation. What, though, if he still has to live down notoriety in the community as a former child molester? Would he "be irreprehensible, . . . have a fine testimony from people on the outside, . . . [be] free from accusation"? (1 Timothy 3:1-7, 10; Titus 1:7) No, he would not. Hence, he would not qualify for congregation privileges.

When a Dedicated Christian Sins

Jehovah understands that we are weak and that even after baptism we may fall into sin. The apostle John wrote to Christians of his day: "I am writing you these things that you may not commit a sin. And yet, if anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. And he is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet not for ours only but also for the whole world's." (1 John 2:1, 2) Yes, on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, Jehovah will forgive baptized Christians who fall into sin—if they truly repent and abandon their wrong course.

An example of this was seen in the first-century congregation at Corinth. The

apostle Paul heard of a case of incestuous fornication in that young congregation, and he gave instructions that the man involved be disfellowshipped. Later, the sinner repented, and Paul exhorted the congregation to reinstate him. (1 Corinthians 5:1, 13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-9) Thus, by the healing power of Jehovah's loving kindness and the great value of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, the man was cleansed of his sin. Similar things may happen today. Again, though, even if a baptized person who commits a serious sin repents and is forgiven in Jehovah's eyes, there may still be ongoing consequences of his sin.—Proverbs 10:16, 17; Galatians 6:7.

For example, if a dedicated girl commits fornication, she may bitterly regret her act and eventually be restored to spiritual health with the help of the congregation. But what if she is pregnant because of her immorality? Then her whole life has been inescapably changed by what she did. A man who commits adultery may repent and not be disfellowshipped. But his innocent mate has Scriptural grounds to divorce him, and she may choose to do so. (Matthew 19:9) If she does, the man, although forgiven by Jehovah, will live the rest of his life with this grave consequence of his sin.—1 John 1:9.

What of a man who unlovingly divorces his wife in order to marry another woman? Perhaps he will eventually repent and be reinstated in the congregation. Over the years he may make progress and "press on to maturity." (Hebrews 6:1) But as long as his first wife lives without a mate, he will not qualify to serve in a responsible position in the congregation. He is not "a husband of one wife" because he had no Scriptural right to divorce his first wife.—1 Timothy 3:2, 12.

Are these not powerful reasons why a Christian should cultivate an abhorrence of what is wicked?

What of a Child Molester?

What if a baptized adult Christian sexually molests a child? Is the sinner so wicked that Jehovah will never forgive him? Not necessarily so. Jesus said that 'blasphemy against the holy spirit' was unforgivable. And Paul said that there is no sacrifice for

While Jehovah
forgives repentant
sinners, there may
be consequences of
their actions that
cannot be avoided

sins left for one who *practices* sin willfully despite knowing the truth. (Luke 12:10; Hebrews 10:26, 27) But nowhere does the Bible say that an adult Christian who sexually abuses a child—whether incestuously or otherwise—cannot be forgiven. Indeed, his sins can be washed clean if he repents sincerely from the heart and turns his conduct around. However, he may still have to struggle with the wrong fleshly impulses he cultivated. (Ephesians 1:7) And there may be consequences that he cannot avoid.

Depending on the law of the land where he lives, the molester may well have to serve a prison term or face other sanctions from the State. The congregation will not protect him from this. Moreover, the man has revealed a serious weakness that henceforth will have to be taken into account. If he seems to be repentant, he will be encouraged to make spiritual progress, share in the field service, even have parts in the Theocratic Ministry School and non-teaching parts in the Service Meeting. This does not mean, though, that he will qualify to serve in a position of responsibility in the congregation. What are the Scriptural reasons for this?

For one thing, an elder must be “self-controlled.” (Titus 1:8) True, none of us have perfect self-control. (Romans 7:21-25) But a dedicated adult Christian who falls into the sin of child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul’s counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: “Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.” (1 Timothy 5:22) For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation. Moreover, he cannot be a pioneer or serve in any other special, full-time service.—Compare the principle at Exodus 21:28, 29.

Some may ask, ‘Have not some committed other types of sin and apparently repented, only to repeat their sin later?’ Yes, that has happened, but there are other fac-

tors to consider. If, for example, an individual makes immoral advances to another adult, the adult should be able to resist his or her advances. Children are much easier to deceive, confuse, or terrorize. The Bible speaks of a child’s lack of wisdom. (Proverbs 22:15; 1 Corinthians 13:11) Jesus used children as an example of humble innocence. (Matthew 18:4; Luke 18:16, 17) The innocence of a child includes a complete lack of experience. Most children are open, eager to please, and thus vulnerable to abuse by a scheming adult whom they know and trust. Therefore, the congregation has a responsibility before Jehovah to protect its children.

Well-trained children learn to obey and honor their parents, the elders, and other adults. (Ephesians 6:1, 2; 1 Timothy 5:1, 2; Hebrews 13:7) It would be a shocking perversion if one of these authority figures were to misuse that child’s innocent trust so as to seduce or force him or her to submit to sexual acts. Those who have been sexually molested in this way often struggle for years to overcome the resulting emotional trauma. Hence, a child molester is subject to severe congregational discipline and restrictions. It is not his status as an authority figure that should be of concern but, rather, the unblemished purity of the congregation.—1 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Peter 3:14.

If a child molester sincerely repents, he will recognize the wisdom of applying Bible principles. If he truly learns to abhor what is wicked, he will despise what he did and struggle to avoid repeating his sin. (Proverbs 8:13; Romans 12:9) Further, he will surely thank Jehovah for the greatness of His love, as a result of which a repentant sinner, such as he is, can still worship our holy God and hope to be among “the upright” who will reside on earth forever.—Proverbs 2:21.