

CANCER

This is a word we all dread; the diagnosis of cancer in a loved one or in ourselves is a devastating and fearful thing. Cancer in most cases, if found early, can be eradicated from our bodies and we can live a normal life. However, if not found early, it can permeate our physical being and cause much pain and even death. Not only does it affect those that are diagnosed with cancer but it affects our family and friends. We have all had family or friends that have had to face this terrible disease and saw the hurt that was caused from the loss of a loved one to this terrible disease.

Sin is very much like cancer in the Christian's life—if diagnosed early and eradicated from one's life, he can continue to have the hope of eternal life with God and Christ in heaven. However, if it is not removed and allowed to grow, one will face eternal death. *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). The word *canker* is used once in the New Testament, and the way it is used indicates something that unless removed will continue to eat away (II Timothy 2:17). Sin operates in much the same way—if we do not remove it, it will continue to eat away at our lives and we will end up succumbing to it. We may think we are happy faithful Christians, but if we let this sin remain we have allowed the cancer of sin to permeate our life and it will lead to eternal death. We have to remove this disease of sin from our lives if we expect to receive life eternal in heaven. *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"* (I John 1:10). The apostle John gave those who have already become Christians instructions on how to remove this cancer of sin. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:9). The apostle went on to say, *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (I John 2:1-4). I think we can plainly see the harm done in the life of one that does not remove this sin by repentance and prayer.

We also need to consider the damage and hurt to one's family. The influence our sin can have on our loved ones can cause them to fall away and be lost as well as ourselves. *"And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea"* (Mark 9:42). To "offend" here is to cause them to sin. This was so important that the words of Jesus are recorded three times regarding this subject (Matthew 18:2; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2).

What is the effect of sin on the church? We have seen how a church can gradually slip away from the old paths and sink into false teachings, the questions; how does this happen? We allow just one little scrap of false teaching to get a very small hold and it will grow into other false teachings and soon you are off the path to heaven. I cannot recall a church going off all at once; it usually is a little false teaching at a time. Again just a small false teaching is like a cancer if allowed to go unchecked it will eventually kill the whole body. Jude told us to *"contend earnestly for the faith"* (verse 3). To "contend earnestly" is to stand pat in the teachings of Christ and his apostles, not to vary to the right or to the left, and to defend the gospel. The sanctity of the church depends on its members clinging to the word of God and not letting the cancer of false teaching go unchecked.

Sadly today we have seen many congregations fall into this category of sin. Why

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THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

CHRISTIANITY—THE BETTER LIFE

Text: _____

I. _____ the _____

Notes:

II. _____ of the _____

Notes:

III. _____ toward _____

Notes:

FOR THE SAKE OF BROTHERLY LOVE

Text: _____

I. Paul's _____

Notes:

II. Paul's _____

Notes:

III. Paul's _____

Notes:

does this happen? Because we as members have allowed the cancer of sin to permeate our lives and have not "*Stud [ied] to shew [ourselves] approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (II Timothy 2:15). You might contend for the faith and the congregation will still not heed the warn-ings—in that case save yourself and move to a faithful con-gregation.

It is a sad thing to see a family member or friend suffer and die from cancer; however, it is a much sadder thing to see a fellow Christian or even a congregation succumb to that cancer of sin. Physical cancer can kill our body but it cannot condemn us to hell; however, sin, spiritual cancer, will condemn us to hell if allowed to go unchecked. "*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matthew 10:28).

-Leland Reed

[NOTE: Brother Reed wrote this article in light of his own battle that he recently had with cancer. Thankfully, doc-tors were able to remove it through surgery. Brother Reed certainly understands the gravity of cancer; but we are thankful to him for pointing out a cancer of far more last-ing effects]

TRACING CHARACTER TO ITS SOURCE

During a thunder storm that contained high winds, a gi-ant oak tree was blown down. The tree was thought to be in perfect health; that is, from outward appearance it seemed to be in good health since it was almost perfectly shaped and full of green leaves. However, the massive tee could not withstand the stress of the high wind because of deterioration on the inside. What started as a tiny corrup-tion at the center of the tree had spread until that tremen-dous tree was so weakened that it was toppled by the wind.

One may reach a point where he forsakes God alto-gether. It is because he (like the tree) has decayed on the inside. Perhaps the deterioration started with a little lie or one small drink of beer or forsaking the assembly to go fishing or camping. Long before our feet carry us where we ought not go, and our hands do what they ought not do, the desire is in our hearts. With pure hearts we will be able to stand the stress of temptation and the stress of everyday living.

"*How can a young man keep his way pure? By guard-ing it according to thy word. With my whole heart I seek thee; let me not wander from thy commandments! I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:9-11).

THE BOOK OF BROTHERS

Paul's epistle to Philemon is one of the shortest books in the Bible, and thus one of the most neglected books in the Bible. But though short in length its subject is one of the greatest known to man—the transforming power of the gospel.

Philemon, from what can be gathered, was possibly a convert of Paul as well as a fellowlaborer in the gospel. He was likely a resident of the city of Colossae and one upon whom Paul looked with great fondness as a friend and brother in Christ. In fact, of Philemon, Paul wrote by salutation to him:

“I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus, for we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother” (Philemon 4-7).

Thus, it is from the outset, obvious, that this is not going to be like any of the other epistles of Paul's; but rather this is going to be a very personal correspondence through which he would reach out unto a brother on behalf of a brother. And while there is a very deep sense of camaraderie between Paul and Philemon regarding their Christianity and acquaintance, Paul is not just writing in order to reminisce because Philemon also was a slave owner and it is concerning one of his slaves that Paul writes to him.

In verse ten we are introduced to a man named Onesimus who had been a slave of Philemon's, but ran away possibly after stealing something from his master (vs. 18). In the midst of his travels Onesimus made his way to Rome where Paul was currently under house arrest (as per Acts 28). Somehow the two came in contact and as was Paul's habit, he took this opportunity to teach Onesimus the truth and convert him while in imprisoned (vs. 10), thereby delivering him from the darkness of sin and into God's marvelous light. With Onesimus' conversion came a strong endearment to Paul with whom he continued after being released from prison. Paul knew, though, that it was not ethically or legally right for him to keep Onesimus as he rightfully belonged to Philemon. Therefore Paul writes this epistle to speak on behalf of Onesimus that Philemon would not punish him upon his return, but rather *“receive him forever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved...”* (vs. 15-16). In fact, Paul did not limit his commendation of Onesimus to Philemon only, but when he wrote to the collective church in Colossae he vouched for Onesimus as a *“faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you”* (Colossians 4:9). Therefore, from the depths of sin and depravity did the gospel message transform the life of a poor slave lost in sin into a child of God and a brother in Christ.

Finally, in verses twenty and following, Paul enumerates his great confidence that his plea to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus would be received and accepted. In fact, Paul's expectations in Philemon exceeded merely what he had requested as he stated: *“Having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say”* (vs. 21). What trust! And if only that level of trust could and would be placed in all Christians today the church and ultimately the world would be a much better place.

The book of Philemon presents a host of marvelous lessons worthy of consideration, but one proposed by Roy Deaver perhaps one of the greatest. He said:

“Paul said to Philemon, about Onesimus: ‘But if he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee aught, put that to mine account; I Paul write it with mine own hand, I will repay it: that I say not unto thee that thou owest to me even thine own self besides (Phile. 18-19).’ In a sense, Onesimus symbolizes all men. All men—because of their sins—have wronged the one to whom they belong. All men owe a debt to God which they cannot pay. Like Paul, our Lord said: ‘Put that debt on my account! I will take care of it.’ The Lord will take the debt of each and every one who will believe upon Him and obey His will. He will bring about complete reconciliation.”

What a marvelous and beautiful little letter filled with sentiment and Christian charity! The subject and themes provide an amazing pattern for how all Christians should regard each other for all time. Among the many ways Paul did and could describe his relationship with Philemon and with Onesimus, the greatest and the one he chose was their brotherly relationship in Christ. Is this a relationship we hold in high regard as children of God?

-Andy Brewer