

Beware of Evil Company, Its Character, Its Conquest, Its Consequence

“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”

1 Corinthians 15:33 NASB

Among the many problems the apostle Paul addressed in his first letter to the church at Corinth was the church’s failure to understand the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 is dedicated to this subject, in particular, to setting the record straight regarding the biblical doctrine of resurrection of the dead.

There were actually individuals in the church at Corinth who were saying there was no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). Sadly, the church in general had grown tolerant of the company of those maintaining such heresy and that tolerance was instrumental in the spread of the heresy which was undermining their faith (v. 14), the message of the apostles (v. 15) and the knowledge the Corinthians had regarding God (vs. 15 and 34). Such undermining led many believers at Corinth into sin (v. 34).

One of Paul’s points as he addressed the resurrection issue was,

“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”

1 Corinthians 15:33 NASB

This verse of Scripture serves as a powerful warning applicable to every aspect of the Christian life.

There are two parts to this warning:

- A. The Command (Do not be deceived)
- B. The Principle (Bad company corrupts good morals)

A. The Command

“Do not be deceived”

The command is a poignant exhortation which immediately addresses three relevant issues:

1. The call to alertness

The command “Do not be deceived” is given to alert us to danger. The two-word phrase “Do Not” is instrumental in capturing our attention and thus, alerting us to danger. We regularly encounter such warnings in our daily lives. Often they appear on signs “Do Not Enter”, “Do Not Cross”, “Do Not Walk”, “Do not take without consulting your physician”, etc. These and many others serve to alert us to dangers and direct us away from them. Failing to heed such warnings can be fatal.

When it comes to ignoring spiritual dangers the stakes are much higher. While ignoring spiritual dangers may result in negative physical or in other words temporal consequences, the consequences of failing to heed alerts to spiritual dangers goes well beyond the temporal and can

negatively affect the believer's walk with God and this is a greater loss than any temporal loss. Therefore, the exhortation serves to alert one to spiritual danger.

2. The element of deception

In the case of 1 Corinthians 15:33 we are warned of the danger of deception. Deception generally refers to something that takes place in the mind. It conveys the idea of perceiving something in such a way other than it actually is. In the Bible, deception relates to perceiving things that are in fact evil or dangerous as if they were good or safe. In the case of our verse and the principle related to it, deception would have one think that "Bad company" ("Evil" in the KJV) does not negatively impact one's Christian walk.

3. The susceptibility to deception

The third point of susceptibility is straight forward but perhaps the most overlooked. The very presence of the alert assumes vulnerability to the danger. Sinking a "Do Not Walk" sign onto the floor of the deepest ocean is for the most part meaningless, due to the fact that there would be no one present who would be susceptible to the danger against which it warned. However, placing the same sign at a busy intersection makes perfect sense seeing that we all, when walking, can be distracted or fail to determine the proper time to cross an intersection and become vulnerable to being struck by a car.

Likewise, regarding deception, if we were not susceptible to deception we would need no warning. If there was no possibility that we could be deceived into believing that bad company would not corrupt good morals, there would be no need to preface the principle, "bad company corrupts good morals" with "Do not be deceived". Thus, the very presence of the exhortation highlights our susceptibility to deception. Thinking we are not susceptible to believing bad company does not corrupt good morals is tantamount to accusing God that His warning is meaningless and that His exhortation to not be deceived makes about as much sense as sinking that "Do Not Walk" sign onto the bottom of the ocean floor.

Therefore, the first part of the warning, in the form of a command, serves as very poignant exhortation as it speaks to us where we are at, alerting us to the very real danger of deception (being led to think incorrectly) and our susceptibility to deception.

B. The Principle

"...bad company corrupts good morals"

Having examined three elements of the command we now come to the principle of the warning "bad company corrupts good morals". At the onset however, let's clarify that we are not talking about those general instances of encountering sinners incidental to living in the cursed world. Paul made this clear back in the 5th chapter when he wrote in verses 9-11,

"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one."

NASB

Such encounters as those incidental to living in the cursed earth which occur at school, work, and just daily living are instrumental for the believer to fulfill God's command to spread the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). It is not these that are in view. Rather, our application of verse thirty-three addresses those conditions wherein one personally pursues and/or harbors bad company tolerating its behavior for whatever reason.

Like the command portion of 1 Corinthians 15:33, the principle has three relevant issues regarding the company kept:

1. Its Character

No time is wasted in identifying the character of the company being addressed. It is "bad company". The Greek noun translated "company" appears only here in the New Testament and refers specifically to persons with whom companionships exist. The adjective used to describe the company comes from a Greek word translated the majority of times in the New Testament as "evil", thus, "evil companionships."

The word "bad" or "evil" is a contrast to the word translated "good" in the same verse. In this verse the word "good" describes the moral character of the people of God. A contrast to this is the immoral or evil character of the flesh.

The context indicates the companionships involved people whose doctrine (teachings) was contrary to God's truth. The companionship may have been formal (sitting under false teachers) or informal (companions who held false beliefs) but either way the character of the company or companionship that was being tolerated was evil.

2. Its Conquest

Having examined the character of the company, we are now introduced to what the "bad company" does. It "corrupts". The Greek word means "to ruin", "destroy", "make perish". The verb tense is present active indicative, which conveys what it is that the bad companionship is presently doing. When bad companionship is tolerated it is always active in corrupting.

The verse does not generate a question leading us to wonder whether a tolerated evil companionship will or will not result in corruption, nor does it indicate that it might not be corrupting at this moment. The fact is that an existing evil companionship is corrupting now. All the while it is tolerated bad company is carrying out its conquest of good morals. Remember the exhortation of the command, "Do not be deceived..." which introduced this principle. To think that bad company for the moment may not be corrupting or might not corrupt in the future is to think contrary to the very Word of God in this verse and thus be deceived.

Take note of a further point regarding the conquest of bad company. The verse informs us that it is the bad company that is invading the good morals. It does not tell us the bad company, when tolerated, is under the conquest of good morals. No! In essence, toleration of bad company is the open door through which bad company enters to corrupt good morals.

3. Its Consequence

As bad company makes conquest of a Christian's good morals the believer loses ground in the pursuit of holiness. 2 John 8 informs us that believers who are not alert to the danger of bad company and harbor it (See 2 Jn. 10) lose that which was accomplished. It is not that salvation is lost but that ground is lost in area of the Christian's responsibility to be sanctified.

Loss of ground in this area is of no small matter for the believer who loves the Lord and as the apostle Paul, is pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (See Phil. 3:1-16).

For further study and vivid examples of the danger of evil company see the evil companionship that good king Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:3-6) had with the evil king Ahab (1 Kings 16:30). The consequence to Jehoshaphat was almost fatal (1 Kings 22:1-40; 2 Chron. 18:1-34) not to mention the fact that God strongly rebuked Jehoshaphat for the evil alliance (2 Chron. 19:1-4). Also consider the effect on Solomon and Israel which resulted from Solomon's cultivation of evil companionships (1 Kings 11:1-13, 29-33; 12:25-33; 2 Kings 17:1-23).

Christian, should you find yourself at this moment tolerating a bad companionship stop being deceived. As the apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth in the very next verse (v. 34), "Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning..." and as he instructed Timothy, "... pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the name of the Lord from a pure heart."