



"And now I am no more in the world,  
but these are in the world..." (John 17:11).

Use this recent news story to help your students see the relevance  
of this week's lesson from the Standard Lesson Commentary®  
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### **NOT REHABILITATION BUT RETRIBUTION**

Joseph R. Wood III was sentenced to death in 1991 for murdering his ex-girlfriend and her father. His execution in Arizona on July 23 required nearly two hours, and the governor ordered an investigation. The report released last week noted that 15 lethal-injection doses were administered over those two hours. All this served to reignite the argument over the death penalty: Is it inhumane? Is it fair, racially or otherwise? Is it really a deterrent? Is it worth the cost of two decades of appeals? Whether one is for or against the death penalty, all seem to agree that its purpose is not rehabilitation but (at least) retribution.

### **NOT VENGEANCE BUT REPENTANCE**

Christians can be found arguing both sides of the death-penalty question. Similarly, those in the church of first-century Corinth seemed to have been divided regarding how to treat the immoral man whom Paul ordered to be disfellowshipped. Paul had been stern in his verdict about the punishment to be imposed. But when repentance came, he was equally adamant in calling for forgiveness and restoration. Some might argue that that process was easier since a death penalty was not involved. But Paul *was* concerned about death—the eternal penalty of death that the offender (and anyone led astray by his sinful example) might receive on Judgment Day.

1. Was Paul advocating "tough love" as we use that concept today? Explain.
2. If the very same situation that Paul addressed occurred in your church, would the offender be excluded from fellowship? Why, or why not?
3. What do Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15; and Titus 3:10 add to the issue of disfellowshipping and restoration?
4. How would you respond to someone who says that exclusion from fellowship is "not a loving thing to do"?
5. What dangers might present themselves in this kind of church discipline?
6. How do we know when repentance is genuine?

—Charles R. Boatman

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