

Church Discipline, The Biblical Principles

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The Purpose For This Study

“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, *but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you*” (II Corinthians 2:4). So wrote the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian assembly in explanation of the primary purpose for the church discipline he directed them to execute (we read about it initially in I Corinthians 5).

In this amazing statement we have two facts that seem to stand in opposition to each other. First, the instructions concerning discipline brought him much pain and tears. Paul was no exaggerator; all knew he meant every word from the depth of his soul. He was saying that the discipline hurt him every bit as much, if not more so, as it hurt the ones to be blamed in allowing this carnality. Paul was not a brutal dictator; he was acting as a loving father. This actually makes Paul’s second statement all the more powerful—the discipline ordered is in reality a manifestation of the deep and abiding *love of God* in his heart for the Corinthian assembly. In other words, the principle of discipline which was ordered by the Head of the church, through His Apostle, is but manifestation of the principle of God’s love for His people! “Whom the Lord *loves* He *chastens!*” (Hebrews 12:6 & Proverbs 3:11,12). Thus the two seemingly contrasting principles of Discipline and Love are actually complementary principles. We, therefore, will learn in this Bible study that the one subject most every preacher wishes to talk about more than anything else—the love of God—is even more surely manifested in the one subject they all *avoid talking about*, i.e., Church Discipline.

“Church Discipline is one of those topics no one really wants to talk about.” This was the lead sentence in a very recent article in a high caliber Calvinistic magazine. The statement really epitomizes the attitude that characterizes most of our modern evangelical churches. I am really persuaded, in light of the statement by the Apostle Paul above (II Cor. 2:4), that modern Christendom’s “love” is very, very superficial. Let me tell you how I was personally introduced to the subject of Church Discipline—

My First Awareness

Many years ago (1954, on a Sunday morning) I walked into a Christian meeting that was somewhat new to me; I had been to a few earlier ones, but I was obviously more of a spectator, than a participator. These Christians had repudiated denominationalism and any form of man-made religious organizations. They claimed to be endeavoring to be nothing more than a local representation of the “body of Christ.” This was totally new ground for me because I had been raised in a dignified Methodist denomination and had now been attending a huge inter-denominational, fundamentalist church that was also

very structured and ordered as to its Sunday morning services. In this group I didn't always know what to expect. They seemed free and spiritually vibrant with many participating. However, during the message I was suddenly shocked to hear a certain man burst out with railing type accusations against the one ministering. In any other church the man would have been immediately expelled by a group of deacons. That did not happen here. Instead, the gentleman who was leading the congregation, and was obviously respected by them, dealt comparatively gently and yet with clear and firm Biblical exhortations that effectively silenced this outburst. The man left alright, but not until after he had slammed the door behind him and then violently kicked it. Of course, I was sitting in the back of the room, not too far from that door and I couldn't help but jump when it was loudly slammed and kicked. I really wondered what the minister was going to say now. And I must say I was pleasantly surprised to see that he was not ruffled in the wrong way at all. It seemed that he preached all the more in sincerity and clarity and frankly addressed the situation, explaining the man's disposition and anger in light of scriptural realities. This minister could have easily entertained us with his intellect; instead he engaged us with his heart over the matter. I was deeply impressed with the spirituality and effectiveness of how this ugly and embarrassing encounter was handled. In fact, rather than driving me away from this group, it drew me closer to them. The discipline that was administered was Biblical, powerful and far more effective than reacting physically or just calling the police.

This was my introduction to the Biblical doctrine of Church Discipline. Indeed, a whole new field opened up before me. Many Scriptures on the subject appeared that I didn't even realize were in the Bible. Most Church organizations don't ever refer to them, let alone implement them. These Christians took the Word of God seriously and implemented discipline, with proper spiritual judgment, in the various situations that were warranted in light of these Scriptures.

The Typical Denominations Ignore Biblical Discipline

Through the years I have collected articles on this subject. One reason I have is because it is rarely ever taught in typical religious circles. A high ranking Southern Baptist said, "This is almost a **lost doctrine** among Baptists." (The emphasis is his.) He bemoaned the fact that the Baptists simply do not practice Scriptural discipline any longer. Another writer in the influential *Christianity Today*, way back in 1974, entitled his article, "**Whatever Happened to Church Discipline?**"

The very popular L.E. Maxwell (now deceased), of the Prairie Bible Institute in Canada, wrote in an interesting article, "It has been well said: 'Discipline is what moderns need the most and want the least.'" Maxwell went on to relate how that true Christian discipleship automatically carries with it real scriptural discipline. You cannot have one without the other. He expounded upon Christ's words, "*He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me*" (John 14:21), as best explained as three complementary truths. "*He that hath My commandments*" is relating to discipleship. "*And keepeth them*" is relating to discipline that follows. The end consequence of the two is the real proof of our "*love*" for Jesus Christ!

In his very popular book *Lessons From A Sheep Dog*, Phillip Keller states—"For the last thirty or more years there has been prominent in the church, and among most

preachers and teachers, an unbalance and unfortunate overemphasis upon the ‘love of God.’ There has been a universal tendency to teach that Christ is so compassionate, so caring, so kind that He does not discipline us for our wrongdoings. There is the false impression now abroad that any old thing can go on, that God will simply forgive and forget all about it. This is simply not so. There is a price to pay for our perverseness. There is a discipline we deserve for wrongdoing...we shrink back from the discipline of God. We would rather that it was set aside. It cannot be...He disciplines because He cares, because He loves, because He heals” (Page 109 and 110).

An article was posted in the Jerusalem Post back in 1977 entitled *Justice*. Statements were quoted from ancient Jewish tradition on the value God places on proper judgment and justice. I could not help but appreciate the relevance of the subject to Israel’s long history in both its glory days and as the reason for the nation’s decline. Some of the articles listed were the following—

“For the sin of delaying the administration of justice, or carelessness that results in injustice, the world is punished with war, plundering, pestilence and drought, and people eat, but remain hungry” (Shabbat 33a).

“A judge who dispenses true justice becomes a partner in Creation with God. God said to the judges: ‘Be careful in dispensing justice, for I am there with you. For I, God, love justice’ (Isa. 61:8), and ‘If you pervert justice, it is Me you pervert’” (Midrash Assada, 21:1).

“ ‘The righteousness and justice that you dispense,’ God said to king David, ‘are dearer to Me than the Temple you wish to build’” (Sifre, Shoftin, 144).

“Jerusalem was destroyed only because they perverted justice, as said (Isa. 1:23) ‘Your very rulers are rebels, confederate with thieves, every one of them a lover of bribes, itching for payoffs’” (Midrash Tehillim 82:1).

This last statement not only fits the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies, but also by the Roman armies in 70 A.D. How realistically it would fit that final destruction of Jerusalem, which came as a direct result of the perversion of justice upon their own Messiah, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Both the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman Pilate expressed amazement that Jesus did not even attempt to answer the witnesses who were heaped against Him. Why should He?—the judgment itself was a forgone conclusion under the direction of perverse men, who were defending their own pride and were intent on destroying the one Who had faithfully rebuked them.

There is no subject that is as important and will stir the heart—either for those who may have experienced perverseness in judgment, or also for those who have experienced godliness in judgment—than this subject. Herein we will have come to learn and value the statutes and laws of God—Exo. 18:16. In addition, the apostle Peter was inspired to warn us “*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*”—(I Peter 4:17).

Make no mistake about it, the Scriptures clearly speak of discipline in the assembly of God. One may twist the Scriptures and another may choose to ignore the Scriptures, but no man can eliminate the Scriptures whereby they will be tested.

PART ONE—THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

The Foundations of Judgment and Discipline Were all laid in the Hebrew Scriptures

When the Apostle Paul first dealt with disciplinary problems in the Corinthian assembly (I Cor. 5:1-13), he reminded them of the fundamental principle from the ceremonial Law that *“a little leaven leavens the whole lump”* (verse 6-8). In other words, the Corinthians needed to *“purge out,”* in this case, the leaven of *“immorality.”* To understand the ramifications of this principle as it relates to matters of Church Discipline and the church’s standing in purity before God is therefore important. In addition, by a second immediate testimony, Paul concludes his instructions to them by a quote from the Hebrew Scriptures—*“Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person”* (I Cor. 5:13). This quote is taken from a repeated statement made in matters of discipline under the Law—see Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 21:21 & 22:21. Paul further reminds the church that the disciplinary actions which happened to Israel in the wilderness were *“our examples”* (I Cor. 10:6) that we should know how to deal with the problems of immorality, idolatry, drunkenness and such like—*“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come”* (I Cor. 10:11). Furthermore, the apostle Paul will specifically quote from principle in the Law, as to the necessity of *“two or three witnesses”* in II Corinthians 13:1, which is taken from Deuteronomy 19:5. All this emphasizes for us the vital importance of knowing the fundamental principles of discipline written in the Law.

And truly, it is in the Hebrew Scriptures that the first principles of proper judgment and discipline of disorderly members in one of God’s congregations are found. It will do us well to survey those Scriptures before we explore the subject in the Church Epistles. These Scriptures are actually rich in vital information and spiritual truth.

It is also important to remember that there is one important difference between the nation of Israel and the Church of Jesus Christ today. This lies in the matter of capital punishment. Israel was a physical nation whose laws covered them in all matters both nationally and spiritually. In other words, the national, tribal and community laws governing their social lives, as well as moral laws governing their spiritual lives, all derived from the same Law of God through Moses. Their national existence was therefore called a *“Theocracy,”* which meant that God was directing their spiritual as well as national existence. The moral principles in the Law were a vital part of their national rule. To violate certain of the moral principles sometimes brought capital punishment, such as being stoned to death. This can never be allowed in the Church of Jesus Christ. Today Biblical Christianity is primarily a spiritual entity living in the midst of many different governmental philosophies. We today depend upon the governmental agencies to create judgmental facilities for those conflicts involving society in general. As to religious matters, they are normally settled by the local congregations or by the higher officially delegated bodies within the particular denomination. Instead of being stoned to death for certain crimes, the discipline is usually in the form of avoidance or censure.

These accounts in the Hebrew Scriptures are rich in vital information revealing the nature and content of God's decrees to order and direct the lives of His people. Proper judgment and discipline of God's people are actually paramount to their existence and functioning on earth. Even before the actual giving of the Law from Mount Sinai, the exercise of judgment and discipline were being administered amongst the people by Moses. God's children, like members of a large family, would look to these directions and instructions with a profound delight, knowing that they were designed for their own protection and encouragement in life's conflicts. The Law was "holy, just and good" the Apostle Paul said (Rom. 7:12). Therefore the implementation of just and righteous judgment in matters concerning the possible violation of these laws is most necessary and desirable. It is only the infidel "non-conformist" who will abhor proper judgment. One such modern atheist has said, "There is no formal religion that does not insist, as its first requirement, on a confession of conformity." This, he complained, took away man's individuality and freedom. What this, and most all infidels don't appreciate, is that man now lives in a sinful and lawless condition in his natural state. It is that sin-nature that does not want conformity to the good and orderly. The redeemed child of God knows he needs conformity to the blessed character of God's desire and design. Thus it is, "conformity" to Christ is a blessing—the actual goal of every believer. Therefore, God's Word on this and all subjects is as Moses was inspired to say, "*Let My teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass*" (Deut. 32:2).

Exodus 18:13-27

Just as Moses brought Israel to the encampment at the foot of Mount Sinai, and before Moses was instructed to ascend the mountain, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came out to meet him and brought Moses' wife and children. They exchanged greetings and Moses explained the victory over the gods of Egypt. On the next day Moses sat to judge the various problems that existed among the congregation and to teach them God's statutes and laws which existed at that time. It was obviously a tedious ordeal for Moses to do this by himself, alone. Not only was Moses exhausted, but the people had to stand in line all day long as well. Perhaps we have all seen court rooms filled with people waiting for their cases to be called, only to have to wait there for many hours before their cases even came before the judge. Well, just imagine how tedious and tiresome was the "court room" of Moses. The line of cases must have been nearly endless. Fortunately the cloud shielded the people from the hot rays of the sun.

Now watching all of this was Jethro. Jethro was not just an ordinary man. He was said to be "Priest of Midian" (Exo. 2:16). Remember that Abraham, who first came into the land of Canaan, met the "Priest of the Most High God" named Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). The writer of the book of Hebrews indicated that this Melchizedek was a type of Jesus Christ. Abraham gave great respect to Melchizedek and so does Moses to Jethro. Moses lived with him for some 40 years, married his daughter and actually was tending to Jethro's flock when he had been called by God to go back to Egypt (Exo. 3:1). Not only did Moses respect Jethro's counsel, but he also asked Jethro's son to be of assistance to Israel in their wanderings (Num. 10:29-32). Special recognition was given the Kenites who were descendents of Jethro when Israel divided the land (Judges 1:16 & 4:11). In

addition, in Jewish tradition that section of the Law which presents the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) was named *Yitro* after Jethro.

Before reading Jethro's counsel we should take note of Moses' explanation of what he was doing. In verse 16 Moses said, "*When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and the other; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.*" Moses was actually accomplishing two very important things. First he was judging between his brethren. This is really interesting because 40 years earlier when Moses attempted to do this in Egypt, his brethren rejected his effort saying, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" (Exo.2:14). And now 40 years later, Moses sat as a prince over them and as a judge. God does amazing things! In addition, Moses was using this occasion to teach them the existing Laws of God. This is significant because in the setting of a controversy is where one will really learn the principles of God's Word. Here is where the Word will be tested and placed into practical use. There is not a better place to learn God's Word than in the workshop of life's controversies.

Here are Jethro's words of counsel to Moses—

"The thing which you are doing is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you. Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people **able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness**; and place such over them to be rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you will do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will go to their place in peace."

Now, admittedly, this is very practical counsel in light of their circumstances. It is well-known that some men are much better organized than others. Moses may not have been the best organizer, but his purpose was right and Jethro knew it. Jethro's counsel was designed to better facilitate that purpose. Therefore, not only was Jethro's counsel practical, it *enhanced* the procedure of teaching the laws of God and implementing proper judgment among the people of God. Consequently, I do not believe that Jethro's statement, "and God so commands you," is to be taken as an usurpation of authority on Jethro's part. Actually we will see later that God's direct revelation to Moses includes much of the same character and quality of Jethro's counsel.

Note especially the character of those who would be judges of the people. First, "*able men*" are to be chosen. This means men who are adept and equipped for the task. No doubt, knowledge and wisdom are important ingredients to be respected. Secondly, "*such as fear God*" are to be selected. In other words, these men have a deep and abiding respect for God and for God's order above any other consideration. They place this fear

above any and all other human values which may divert correct judgment. Thirdly, they are “*men of truth.*” Oh, the joy of a righteous man to know that he will stand before men who love the truth. The truth, of course, is not merely searching for the factuality of events to be judged, but loving the truth of God’s Word to bear upon the judgment. And lastly, for this position we must have men “*hating covetousness.*” In other words, these men cannot be bribed! (Of course, money is not the only way judges could be persuaded to make the wrong judgment.) Now if every person knew this is the kind of a court room he is entering, we would say “let’s go to court every day.” Yes, indeed, we should all look forward to it.

The primary thing God directly adds to this organizational scheme is, according to Jewish tradition, the designation of what came to be called the “Sanhedrin” (the Greek term for Council). In Numbers 11:16, 17 & 24, 25 God tells Moses to gather “seventy men of the elders of Israel” to assist him in bearing the burden of the nation. This Council consequently maintained a forum of 70 members, plus the leadership of the High Priest. It is referenced many times in the Greek Scriptures simply by the designation of “the Council.” In addition, at the time Moses appointed these men, God imparted His Spirit upon them. On this first occasion the text says they “prophesied.” This became what we would call “the Supreme Court” for all judgmental matters in Israel. (Interestingly enough, the Sanhedrin has now been reinstated in the modern nation of Israel for religious matters only.)

Exodus 23:1-9 & Leviticus 19:15-18

In these passages Moses gives many principles of justice and judgment that should be held in esteem by the nation—

“You shall not circulate a false report.
Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.
You shall not follow a crowd to do evil;
Nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after man
to pervert (judgment).
You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute...
You shall not pervert the judgment of the poor in his dispute.
Keep yourself far from a false matter.
Do not kill the innocent and the righteous;
for I will not justify the wicked.
And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning
and perverts the words of the righteous.
Also you shall not oppress a stranger...”

“You shall do no injustice in judgment.
You shall not be partial to the poor,
Nor honor the person of the mighty.
In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.
You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people;
Nor shall you take a stand (perversely) against the life of your neighbor:
I am the LORD!
You shall not hate your brother in your heart.

You shall surely rebuke your neighbor,
and not bear sin upon him.
You shall not take vengeance,
nor bear any grudge against the children of your people.
But you shall love your neighbor as yourself:
I am the LORD!”

This is an amazing list of characterizations which all who enter into judgment should read, understand and cause to be remembered before consideration is given to any matter between brethren. It certainly prepares the heart for proper judgment. And with these is the reminder that the LORD is present and vitally interested!

Exodus 32:26-29 & Deuteronomy 33:8-10

One of the most remarkable episodes of judgment was the discipline that took place at the foot of Mount Sinai when Moses came down and saw the golden calf and the unrestrained revelry of the people before it. The death of three thousand Israelites who participated in this idolatry, which took place at the foot of the very mountain where the Law was given, marked God’s holy wrath and disciplinary judgment in that it was directly ordered by God and immediately carried out.

“Then Moses stood at the entrance of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is on the LORD’S side—come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, “Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp; and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.”’”

So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people (involved in the idolatry) fell that day.

Then Moses said, ‘Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.’”

It appears that the Levites were without partiality, even for their own family members, in the execution of this judgment ordered by God. It is not until the last book Moses wrote that we are told what the “blessing” was that God bestowed upon the Levites. Namely, it was the privilege of ministering the Word of God to the people. And so it would indicate, God wants the ministers of His Word to be impartial men.

“And of Levi He said...
‘Who says of his **father** and **mother**, “I have not seen them” (i.e. they were impartial towards them); Nor did he acknowledge **his brothers**, or know **his own children**; for they have observed Your Word and kept Your covenant. They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law. They shall put incense before You, and whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar.’”

For those who believe that “marking and avoiding” should never involve family members, Scriptures like these look them square in the face, and should by all means shut

their mouths. The same God Who ordered the proper honor and respect for fathers and mothers also ordered these principles to be carried out in an assembly when fathers and mothers would pervert the truths of God. Thank God, Jesus Christ introduces us to a new spiritual family relationship that endures throughout eternity.

Leviticus 20:1-5

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, ‘Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendents to Molech, **he shall surely be put to death.** The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendents to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name.

And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendents to Molech, and they do not kill him, then **I will set My face against that man** and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.”

The importance of this passage is to illustrate the principle that failure by a person to execute the initial judgment, actually brings the same condemnation prescribed upon himself. Some in the Church today have mockingly referred to this principle as “dominoes in marking.” They don’t believe that anyone who refuses to implement a marking should themselves be marked to be avoided. Of course, it is very clear from this passage (and the next one, and many others) that God orders the discipline of those who refuse to execute the prescribed discipline on the initial guilty party.

Numbers 16:24-27 & 41-50

“Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’ Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, ‘Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing that is theirs, **lest you be consumed in all their sins.**’ So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram...”

Here the principle of the uniform separation by all the members of the congregation from the party under discipline is made clear. Any who would choose not to separate themselves from the guilty party would automatically be partakers in the very same discipline imposed on the initial party.

Now, on this initial occasion all the congregation got away from these men. Thus they were for the time being spared. However, most of the people had second thoughts about this judgment. They apparently thought the judgment was too severe on these noble men, and so they expressed their feelings openly the next day—

“On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the LORD.’”

Were it not for the intervention of Moses and Aaron on behalf of the congregation they all would have been destroyed (see verses 42-46). The text says of Aaron—

“And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident...”

For those in certain Christian circles today who bemoan a proper discipline, and refuse to participate by saying, “We don’t believe in ‘Dominoes in Marking,’” I would herein respond, by asking, “Is 14,700 ‘dominoes’ enough to convince you otherwise?” I am simply addressing here the principle taught in these Scriptures of the necessity of compliance with the godly judgment or else participate in the penalty. It becomes obvious that the reason God orders and even executes this penalty, upon those who refuse to implement the prescribed discipline upon unruly members, is because those members are themselves unruly and countenance the crime by their refusal to execute judgment. Consequently, by this carnal action, in the sight of God, they become guilty of the very sin of the initial guilty party.

Deuteronomy 1:13-18

In the next passage we shall read, Moses reiterates the selection of responsible leaders and judges on the same basis as Jethro’s counsel and further exhorts them in the principles of godly judgment, and assures them that the judgment “IS GOD’S.”

“Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you. And you answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have told us to do is good.’ So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment, you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, **for the judgment is God’s**. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.’ And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.”

You will notice that I emphasized the statement that “*the judgment is God’s*.” This is important and will be stated again in other Scriptures. It tells us that as originally intended, the proper judgment that is executed under Biblical principles is in reality an extension of the very judgment God would make, and in effect, it is God’s judgment. Now this becomes a very sober responsibility under this realization. No doubt, this same principle is true in Church judgments that are executed within these perimeters.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5

This passage will illustrate the supremacy of the Word of God over an apparent miracle by a false prophet. The carnal brother or unbelieving person, who is impressed by the performance of such a prophet, will easily deviate from the truth of God.

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So shall you put away the evil from your midst.”

Deuteronomy 13:6-11

The following passages will illustrate the serious judgment that should be taken when false religious ideologies creep into the communities of Israel. Most noticeably this judgment begins with a person’s *own close relatives*.

“If **your brother**, the son of your mother, **your son** or **your daughter**, **the wife of your bosom**, or **your friend** who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, or the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of **all the people**. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.”

Verses 6-11 are very remarkable and sobering commands from the God of Israel. They specifically address the issue of judgment that is to be exercised against one’s own relatives and close family members. It is to be remembered that this is an inter-assembly discipline. When one from our very heart and midst, who has known the truth of the one, true God, would perversely try to lead us or others to worship other gods, this is their judgment. “Your hand,” that is the hand of the nearest relative who knows what has happened, is to be the first against them, next that of all the other people. Their death is the punishment and you are not to pity such. Those who, with soulish sympathy, cry out against inter-family judgment and discipline, claiming that it contradicts the fifth commandment, need to realistically read these instructions from the God of Israel.

We must ask, “What are the principles herein that are applicable to the Church of Jesus Christ?” Obviously, since we are not a theocracy like Israel, the death penalty is not applicable. However, some clear principles are set before us—

1.) There is obviously to be no partiality with your friends or even closest relatives. Some might think this would cause one who implements the judgment to contradict the command to “honor your father and mother,” if they were involved. I can simply assure you it does not contradict, unless you want to believe that the God, who gave the fifth commandment, contradicts Himself by these instructions. This would mean today that censure or break of Christian fellowship would be implemented against your own loved ones, were they to be guilty of teaching or embracing another Christ, another doctrine, or another church, other than that taught in the Word of God. As we shall see in Paul’s epistles, Church Discipline applies to all irrespective of physical family relationships.

2.) Such a person should not be hidden or concealed. This would only prevent judgment and allow the poison to permeate secretly further amongst others.

3.) “Your hand shall be first against him.” This means that the ones closest to the crime and the criminal are the ones to first divulge it and to prosecute it. This command should embarrass any carnal Christians who are family members of those who sin, but choose to sit back and let others do the dirty work of seeking out the information and proposing the punishment. Many of these relatives know good and well what their family members have done, but carnally refuse to move a finger to deal with the problem. This is ungodly.

4.) Lastly, “*all the people*” shall share in implementing the judgment. I can guarantee you, “all” means “all,” as we shall see again later on in this study. In addition, “*all*” the nation shall hear and fear. It becomes obvious in reading through these Hebrew Scriptures that God repeatedly commands “all” in a given community to implement the judgments. See the following passages as examples:

Lev. 24:13-16—(For blasphemy) “...let *all* the congregation stone him.”

“*All* the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land.”

Num. 15:32-36—(For breaking the Sabbath) “*All* the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.”

Deut. 13:9 & 11—(For serving other gods) “...and afterwards the hand of *all* the people.”

“So *all* Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness...”

Deut. 17:7—(For serving other gods) “...and afterwards the hands of *all* the people.”

Deut. 21:21—(The rebellious son) “Then *all* the men of the city shall stone him to death...And *all* Israel shall hear and fear.” etc.

There is no question that uniformity in godly discipline was the norm expected. This will also be reflected in Church Judgments. For instance, the apostle Paul will charge the whole Corinthian assembly, when it is “*gathered together*” (I Cor. 5:4), to implement the judgment upon the sinning brother. This discipline, of necessity, must have the imprimatur of the whole in contrast to that of a few.

Deuteronomy 13:12-18

The third portion of this chapter of Scripture is equally strong in showing God's hatred of religious rebellion—

“If you hear someone in one of your cities, which the LORD your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘*Corrupt men* have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods”’ which you have not known; then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock, with the edge of the sword. And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder, for the LORD your God. It shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again. So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of His anger and show you mercy, have compassion on you and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, because you have listened to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of the LORD your God.”

This particular commandment will be the basis for later judgment against a whole tribe in the nation of Israel. Certain “perverted men” committed such immorality in one city as would bring the destruction of many thousands of people. Because the inhabitants of that tribe would not execute judgment, that whole tribe was nearly exterminated.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with **just judgment**. **You shall not pervert justice**; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”

This is a short but clear command that Almighty God designed for “just judgment;” furthermore, He equipped Israel with the necessary guidelines in order to avoid the perversion of justice. It becomes sadly obvious in Israel's later history that the perversion of justice characterized their apostasy, even to the extent of the condemnation of their very own Messiah.

Deuteronomy 17:8-13

“If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God

chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.

You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.

Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, **that man shall die.** So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.”

Now notice carefully, this instruction is not that the initial guilty party be put to death, but rather the man who refuses to execute the penalty will be put to death! This therefore, is another of the several passages that specifically addresses the guilt and penalty of those who will not execute proper judgment against a convicted party.

It is proper to call those individuals who refuse to execute proper discipline—“presumptuous people.” Discipline that has been explained in the light of the Word of God by God’s ministers has the stamp of Heaven’s approval upon it. Those who act independently of this are “presuming” their own authority and opinion over God’s.

Deuteronomy 19:15-21

“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; **by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.**

If a **false witness** rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then ***both men in the controversy*** shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make ***careful inquiry***, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then **you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother;** so you shall put away evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

The principle of establishing everything in the mouth of two or three witnesses is repeated in the Scriptures relating to Church judgments—Matthew 18:16; II Corinthians 13:1 & I Timothy 5:19.

In addition, hearing both sides of a controversy is absolutely mandatory as a fundamental principle in the Law. Herein it became Jewish custom that no one could ever be pronounced guilty of a crime or violation until such a person had the opportunity for self defense. In other words both the accuser and the accused must be allowed to speak. The Judges could not make judgment until the accused was allowed his defense.

Joshua 22:10-34

In this next section of Scripture we will learn a most important lesson; namely, to never execute a judgment, no matter how apparent it may be, until you hear the accused!

Without quoting the details of this account, I will briefly explain it. The combined armies of the twelve tribes of Israel had been fighting side by side for seven years in order to conquer the whole land of Canaan west of the Jordan River. The land on the east of Jordan had already been conquered previously, but it was not going to be occupied by the two and one half tribes designated for it until after they had shared in the battle for all the land west of Jordan. Now that the wars were over, they were told they could return to fully settle in their lands east of Jordan. All departed in peace and happiness.

Shortly thereafter a report came back to the other nine and one half tribes that the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had built a huge sacrificial altar right at the Jordan River just before they crossed over. On the face of this accurate (but incomplete) report the nine and one half tribes armed for war, because this was an obvious violation of the Law that sacrifices should be done only at the place previously designated where the Tabernacle stood. By all appearances this was an act of rebellion and apostasy on the part of the two and one half tribes. Israel armed for more war—only this time against their own brethren.

The army of Israel approached the site and saw the altar. They were all prepared for battle. Fortunately, Phinehas and ten rulers of the nine and one half tribes faced the other two and one half tribes with this apparent violation of the Law and expected an explanation for their action. When it was explained to them that this altar was not for sacrifices, but only for a “witness” to their rights of access to the services at the Tabernacle, and the right to worship the God of Israel jointly with all the tribes on the west of Jordan, the whole matter changed into one of rejoicing instead of war. This was a happy day because of the radical turn of events when they heard the explanation by their brethren. Rather than being an apostasy, it became a reason for rejoicing.

In Jewish custom the principle expressed in Deut. 19:17, that “*both men* in a controversy must stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges,” was the basis for always giving the accused an opportunity for defense.

This principle of first hearing from the accused is repeated for us in the gospel of John (7:51). Nicodemus stated the principle in a question form before the Council, “does our Law judge a man *before it hears him and knows what he is doing?*”

Judges 19 & 20 & 21

These chapters of the book of Judges contain a most sad and gruesome story at a low time in Israel’s history. However, it illustrates for us the fact of what happens when there is failure to execute godly, disciplinary judgment.

“Certain perverted men of the city” of Gibeah (19:22) brutally assaulted another man’s wife (or concubine) to the extent that she died. Apparently the conditions in this city were known by many in the town itself, but nothing had ever been done about it.

When the whole nation of Israel was notified, they collectively gathered an army and approached the tribe of Benjamin where Gibeah was situated. They appealed to the tribe of Benjamin to turn over these wicked men for execution. Though the tribal people of all the rest of Benjamin had never done such a thing as these “perverted men” did, yet they would not execute judgment upon them, nor would they turn them over for judgment to the army of Israel (20:13). Apparently they did not believe this action on their part would make the whole tribe guilty of the crime in the sight of God—but it did! They smugly would not cooperate, and instead prepared their own army in case of a battle.

The results were disastrous to the whole nation of Israel, as well as to the tribe of Benjamin, and to any other city who did not participate in this judgment. Some 40,030 men of the nation of Israel died (20:21, 25 & 31). This meant that Israel bore a national responsibility for allowing such a condition to exist in their midst. Next, God’s direction brought about the near destruction of the whole tribe of Benjamin, involving some 25,100 men, besides all the women and children in their cities which were destroyed (20:35). In addition, *Israel sought out any other city that did not assist them in the judgment* against Benjamin and *destroyed them as well* (how many were killed in this case we are not told)—see 21:5-11. That means that somewhere in the vicinity of at least 100,000 people died because of failure to judge a few “perverted men.”

This is another instance, of gigantic proportions, where the failure to execute proper discipline on a few brought about the near destruction of a whole tribe, a whole city, plus many thousands of the whole nation itself.

II Chronicles 19:5-10

During the highlight of Israel’s greatness, King David “administered judgment and justice to all his people” (II Samuel 8:15). But only rarely during Israel’s apostasy was proper judgment ever restored. On one occasion it was reinstated and expanded upon by king Jehoshaphat in a time of reformation among the southern tribes. This passage is important to quote—

“Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, ‘Take heed to what you are doing, **for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, Who is with you in the judgment.** Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, **for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God,** no partiality, nor taking of bribes.’
Moreover in Jerusalem, for **the judgment of the LORD** and for controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the chief fathers of Israel, when they returned to Jerusalem. And he commanded them, saying, ‘Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and with a loyal heart: whatsoever case comes to you from your brethren who dwell in their cities, whether of bloodshed or offences against law or commandment, against statutes or ordinances, you shall warn them, lest they trespass against the LORD and wrath come upon you and your brethren. Do this, and you will not be guilty.’”

The important fact about this statement of Jehoshaphat is that he recognizes true judgment over God's people as being the same as God's judgment. The judgment is "for the LORD." The LORD "is with you in the judgment." And it therefore amounts to "the judgment of the LORD." This is similar in nature to what we saw in Deuteronomy 1:13-18 where it is stated "for the judgment is God's." I believe this was also the reflection of Christ when He said regarding proper Church judgment, "*Whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew 18:18). God, Himself, is pleased to identify with proper, spiritual and truthful judgment among His people.

In this regard, Psalm 89:14 is apropos—"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face." And also Isaiah 61:8—"For I, the LORD, love justice..."

On the other hand, "*These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren*"—Proverbs 6:16-19.

In Conclusion From The Hebrew Scriptures

Though Jerusalem was once "a city of justice" (Isaiah 1:21), yet in its apostasy "no one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth" (Isaiah 59:4), and "therefore justice is far from us" and "We look for justice, but there is none" (Isaiah 59:9 & 11). Although God called for them "to establish justice in the gate" (Amos 5:15), yet instead Israel "turned justice to wormwood" and to "gall" (Amos 5:7 & 6:12).

THANKFULLY, this is not the end of the story, for the prophets also promised on Israel's behalf—Jeremiah 23:5,

"Behold the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will raise unto David a Righteous Branch; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth."

And again through Isaiah God tells us—Isaiah 1:26,

"I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

Summary of Important Lessons from the Law On the Subject of Judgment and Discipline

- 1.) It is the occasion for teaching the laws and statutes of God—
Exo. 18:13-27.
- 2.) The moral qualities and character of the judges should be of
the highest caliber—Exo. 18:13-27.

- 3.) The ethics to follow in judgment are the most desirable—
Exo. 23:1-9 & Lev. 19:15-18.
- 4.) Not to show partiality toward one's own family members
and loved ones—Deut. 13:6-11 & Exo.32:26-29.
- 5.) The failure of individuals to execute judgment brings judgment
upon themselves—Lev. 20:1-5; Num. 16:24-27 & 41-50;
Deut. 17:8-13 & Judges 19-21.
- 6.) “All” are to participate in the execution of the discipline—
Lev. 24:14 & 16; Num. 15:35 7 36; Deut. 13:9 & 11; 17:7 & 21:21.
- 7.) The failure of Israel to execute godly judgment was an indicator
of apostasy and of national demise—Isa. 1:21; 59:9,11 & Amos 5:15.
- 8.) Remember the judgment is God's—Deut. 1:13-18; 19:17; &
II Chron. 19:5-10.
- 9.) The importance of the two or three witnesses—Deut. 19:15-21.
- 10.) Remember to always hear the accused— Deut. 19:17 & Joshua 22:10-34.

Thankfully—
when the Kingdom is set up proper judgment will be restored—
Isa. 1:26 & Jer. 23:5.

When a Christian gives careful consideration to all the principles taught in the Hebrew Scriptures (and I am sure there are many more to be found) concerning this matter of assembly discipline and judgments, he will have much better preparation and appreciation for understanding and executing Church Discipline within the body of Christ.

No one can fail to read the Law and the Prophets without realizing that Almighty God wants, above all else, a sincere holiness among His people—“Be you holy, for I AM HOLY” (Leviticus 11:45; 19:2 & I Peter 1:15,16).

“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,
therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”
Ecclesiastes 8:11

“Cursed be the one who does the LORD'S work negligently,
and cursed be the one who restrains his sword from blood.”
Jeremiah 48:10

Though the context of this last passage is God's judgment upon the Moabites, yet the principle is fully illustrated in King Saul's failure to execute properly the discipline God called against the Amalekites (I Sam. 15). In a similar vein, those who are ministers today must realize that “negligence” and soulish “restraint” in executing proper Biblical discipline when it is called for, only brings dishonor and a “curse” upon themselves.

SECTION TWO—THE GREEK SCRIPTURES

Matthew 18:15-20

The first mention of judgment and discipline in the Greek Scriptures is by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as recorded in Matthew 18:15-20. And the first question that some ask is whether or not this passage is directly applicable to the Church which is Christ's body. In answer to that question we must recognize several facts.

It is true that Christ was specifically ministering the gospel of the Kingdom almost *exclusively* to the nation of Israel during His earthly ministry (Matt. 10:5, 6 & 15:24). This is not to say Christ never spoke to Gentiles or Samaritans, but when He did it was usually within the context of their relationship to Judaism (Matt. 15:26-28 & John 4:22). Even in the gospel of John, Christ indicated the time for ministry to the Gentiles will be after His death and resurrection (John 12:20-24). The apostle Paul made reference to Christ in His earthly ministry as “*a minister to the circumcision*, to confirm the promises made to the fathers” (Rom. 15:8). (In contrast to this, Paul was directed to go chiefly as “*a minister to the Gentiles*”—Rom. 15:16).

The primary “promise” that was made to Israel's fathers was that of an earthly, physical Kingdom wherein the Messiah would sit upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32). The prophets said that this Kingdom would engulf the whole world (Dan. 2:35, 44), and would be administered in and through a restored nation of Israel (Zech. 14:16, 17). This Kingdom would be implemented, as it were, through the government under a “New Covenant” made with the nation of Israel. The nature of this Covenant would be the Law written within the hearts of all the people (Jer. 31:31-34 & Heb. 8:10). Within this Covenant the Law would be under a new administration. Now, Jesus Christ, as Israel's King was born under the Law (Gal.4:4), and His ministry was specifically not to abrogate the Law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). This was the nature of His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. In addition, He placed warnings against anyone who would break one of its least commandments (Matt. 5:19).

This is the contextual setting for Christ's words about judgment and discipline in Matthew 18:15-20. In fact, chapter 18 begins with the question by the apostles “Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”—meaning the coming Messianic Kingdom. In addition, Christ gives a parable immediately following the subject of discipline with these words, “Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king...” (Matt. 18:23). So, Israel's long hoped for Messianic Kingdom is the immediate and direct recipient for any application to be made from this passage. Consequently, the direct immediate application of these truths is for the Kingdom Church (assembly). Please remember that the Greek word *ekklesia* (lit. assembly or, as in the King James—“church”) was already used many times in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, called the Septuagint. It was most always used in relationship to Israel. Therefore, when any of the Jewish disciples heard the word *ekklesia* used in relation to this subject, they thought of a local congregation of Israel. No doubt this is what the apostles were thinking.

However, all this does not mean there is no application of these instructions to the Church which is Christ's body, for there most certainly is. This is especially true if we also keep in remembrance that the Apostles served a dual place of leadership. On the one hand, in their "reigning with Christ" they had the specific promise from Christ that they "would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (see Matt. 26:29 & Luke 22:30). But, in light of the historical, official rejection by the Jewish nation of their promised King and Kingdom, that Kingdom was "taken from them to be given to another generation (or nation)," to be set up at a future unknown time (Matt. 21:43 & Acts 1:6). In the mean-time a Spiritual phase of the Kingdom of God was set up on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:7,8; Eph. 1:13; Rom. 14:17 & Col. 1:13). Now, on the other hand, the very same apostles served as the foundation for the "Church which is Christ's body"—Eph. 2:20; 3:5 & I Cor. 12:28). It is also true that this *ekklesia*, for its first several decades, was considered only as a sect of Judaism and the Jewish members continued to practice the Law of Moses. Nevertheless, Pentecost was the actual beginning of the body of Christ in this age. It was only gradually revealed that for this Age, the Law would be abrogated—Hebrews 8:13. Consequently, there are some identities shared by these two different assemblies; we should not shut our eyes to the principles of Christ's counsel on judgment and discipline that do have a secondary application to us today.

The Text

- (15) "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 (Greek, *ekklesia*, or assembly). But if he refuses to hear the church (assembly), let him be like a heathen and a tax collector.
(18) Assuredly, I say to you, whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
(19) Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.
(20) For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

The Interpretation

These instructions first of all give a clear general procedure to follow. It is important for us to remember that these principles are based upon the premise that this is an honest and correct handling of a judgmental matter. The problems of personal vindictiveness, false witnesses, or prejudicial judgments are not directly addressed.

The procedure is to first try and rectify the problem privately. Thankfully, that procedure rules out unnecessary gossip. The goal, as expressed by Christ, is to "gain your brother," not to lose him (verse 15). That should always be our first effort and goal.

If the problem is of serious enough consequences, and the first step is not satisfactory, then take two or three witnesses, as actually prescribed by the Law (Deut. 19:15-21). The witnesses are fellow brethren who will also hear the case, make a judgment themselves, and will be able to accurately give affirmation to the issues. It is

very important that witnesses study the Hebrew Scriptures to see the importance of being accurate as witnesses and to also make sure they know to what they are witnessing. Witnesses need to do everything possible to erase any chance of misunderstanding. It becomes a very serious matter for a brother to reject this judgment (verse 16).

The third procedure is to “tell it to the *ekklesia*.” This would appear as the Supreme Court in judging important matters of discipline. Does this mean that every problem that comes up the whole assembly of men, women and children must hear it? No, it does not. In many cases this would properly involve all the men folk in the assembly who could hear the evidences, the witnesses, judge the matter and report it before the general mixed assembly (verse 17). The importance of the assembly hearing the case will provide investigating any weaknesses in the charges, or errors in the witnesses’ testimony.

Presuming that the assembly has evaluated correctly, a judgment will be issued. Christ places a premium upon this judgment. In addition, from this verse (17), if the individual (or individuals) refuse to hear what the collective gathering of brethren judge, then certain discipline must be administered to him. That discipline is spelled out very clearly in terms of avoidance, as they would avoid an “unclean” Gentile or the despised tax collectors for the Roman government. They are not to be associated with; they are now to be considered as placed outside the fellowship and association of the assembly.

The Judgment is Christ’s

In addition, Christ tells us in verses 18, 19 and 20 a very crucial fact—that this judgment is a reflection of the very judgment of heaven itself. This is actually similar to several such statements in the Hebrew Scriptures that we noted before: namely, Exo. 32:26-29—“Who is on the Lord’s side?” and Deut. 1:13-18—“the judgment is God’s” and II Chron. 19:5-10—“the LORD is with you in the judgment.” So then, if a brother were to scorn a proper assembly judgment, he would, in fact, be scorning the judgment of God in heaven. That, of course, is a contemptible and even more serious matter to surely be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The words “binding” and “loosing” (verse 18) have provoked responses from different sects in Christendom. To the Roman Catholic pontifical authority, it is interpreted as heaven’s certification of their august judgments. But their august, pontifical judgments have nothing whatsoever to do with Biblical reality or the headship of Christ. They have created another “church” for which “Heaven” has nothing but contempt. The same is true for a great variety of the Protestant denominations and the various cults that pronounce their ipse-dixit judgments.

“Binding” would have reference to the negative aspect of the judgment. That is, the individual is placed under restraint or condemnation in his sins. The “loosing” is reference to the freeing of one from the guilt and penalty, either by his innocence or repentance. It has also been pointed out that these two verbs (binding and loosing) in the Greek are in the “future perfect passive” tense, so as to indicate what has already taken place “in heaven.” The words could properly be rendered “shall have been bound in heaven” and “shall have been loosed in heaven.” In other words, this judgment is actually the church’s ratification of what is heaven’s judgment and not vice-versa. The church is thus expressing the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

The “agree (ment)” by two or more brethren, expressed in verse 19, is not what many Pentecostals have claimed as the basis for God performing some miracle which has been requested. Rather it must be understood in this context of a church judgment. The object of the “agreement” is about “anything (Greek—*pragma*) that they shall ask.” This word does not mean “just anything,” but it is specifically a word used in “judicial matters.” It was used in the Greek world “in relationship to lawsuits” (see W. E. Vine). See and compare Rom. 16:2 (where it is translated “business”); I Cor. 6:1 (translated “a matter of law”); II Cor. 7:11 (meaning a “matter” of judgment) and I Thess. 4:6 (translated in the context of “defraud” your brother in any “matter”). Therefore, this must be understood as requesting God’s guidance in the matter of judgment. God’s response, primarily through His Word, is a positive one, “it shall be done.”

The positive assertion of verse 20, “there am I in the midst,” though often quoted as applicable to Christ’s presence in a small Christian meeting, which is indeed a truth, is actually not what is in view in this context. “Where two or three are gathered” has reference to the “two or three witnesses” of verse 16. “In My name” has reference to the authority of Christ in the judgment. And “there am I in the midst of them” has reference once again to Christ’s presence in the judgment.

Let us remember that these beautiful and proper procedures are given to fallible men, who very often fail to implement, in every respect, a perfect execution of these instructions. Nevertheless, the instructions stand as a guideline to which our hearts, as blood-bought members of Christ’s assembly, must be in tune.

The Judgment is made by the Church

Another important consideration must be made to the fact that this is an assembly decision and judgment. Christ is emphasizing that such discipline against an erring brother or brothers must be executed by the whole group as opposed to a judgment by an individual or a few. Sometimes an individual or small group of individuals become highly respected by an assembly. It becomes easy and a shortcut to rely upon them for judgment. This has dangers. An individual may make the initial charge, but the whole assembly cannot act on a single charge without validation. A small group of individuals may also make the charge, but again the whole assembly cannot act in implementing discipline until the whole hears and weighs the evidence. The whole assembly must make the charge that will be executed by the whole assembly. Technically speaking, a leader or a few persons cannot implement on behalf of the whole assembly, without that whole assembly getting involved in the case. Discipline by the whole church automatically mandates a judgment by the whole church. Sad to say, in many ages, and most certainly this one in which we live, which contains the ultimate times of apostasy, many judgments are allowed and acted upon which are made only by highly respected persons. Though this simple procedure may save a lot of time and relieve the whole assembly of the burdensome ordeal of a hearing, nevertheless, it is not what Christ has ordered.

In addition, it is positively understood that in a judgment of this kind, the individual under indictment has every opportunity to defend himself. When an “offending” individual is approached, it is certainly understood that he be allowed to speak for himself. In addition, when two or three witnesses hear the case, the individual must be allowed to defend himself. The same would be true when the church hears his

case. If the church will hear the witnesses, they must also hear the man; he must be allowed to defend himself—that is a given. We will have more to say about this later.

II Thessalonians 3:6-15

1st. and 2nd. Thessalonians are the first epistles from the pen of the inspired Apostle Paul. Paul specifically encouraged the first letter to be read among all the saints (I Thess. 5:27). Just as important as other basic doctrines touched on in these letters are the instructions concerning Church Discipline in this second letter. Actually these instructions in II Thessalonians should be prefaced by Paul’s last words in I Thessalonians 5:14—

(I Thess. 5:14) “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are ***unruly*** (or disorderly). . . .”

(6) “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.

(7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we did not behave ourselves ***disorderly*** among you;

(8) nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

(9) not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

(10) For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

(11) For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a ***disorderly*** manner, ***not working at all, but are busybodies***.

(12) Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

(13) But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

(14) 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.”

The Interpretation

In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, he admonished them regarding different conducts that would enhance their testimony and certainly distinguish them from the unsaved. For example, on the positive side they were to “walk worthy of God” (2:12) and they were to “abound toward one another in love” (3:12). On the negative side they were to “abstain from sexual immorality” (4:3), not to “defraud a brother” (4:6), and in addition, Paul adds yet another exhortation that was an apparent Thessalonian weakness, “to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands” (4:11). In doing this they would be following Paul’s example “of laboring night and day” while he was physically with them (2:9). Of course, Paul was an example in many areas—“how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you” (2:10).

In capping off these exhortations, in Paul's final words of his first letter, he had urged them to "warn the ***unruly***" (I Thess. 5:14), or so it is translated in the KJV, NKJV and the NASB. In the RV and ASV it was a similar word, "disorderly." This is from the Greek word *ataktos*, which is used only four times in the Greek Scriptures, and that is by Paul. The other three occasions are in the text above (II Thess. 3:6, 7 & 11), where it is usually translated in the same literal manner as "disorderly."

"Disorderly"

The standard Lexicons which are available to the layman state as follows—Henry Alford in his *Critical Commentary* says specifically on this first occasion, "The original word is especially said of the soldier who does not remain in his rank: hence disorderly." The same is stated by A. T. Robertson in his *Word Studies*. W.E. Vine says, "...in I Thess. 5:14, describing certain church members who manifested an insubordinate spirit, whether by excitability or officiousness or idleness." Here in I Thessalonians, and also in II Thess. 3:6, the word seems to be used as a general exhortation without specifying any certain kind of "unruliness," but only unruliness (*an insubordinate spirit*, W.E.Vine) in general. In this regard, the famed *Albert Barnes Notes On The New Testament* say, "A 'disorderly walk' denotes conduct that is in any way contrary to the rules of Christ. The proper idea of the word used here (*ataktos*) is that of soldiers who do not keep the ranks; who are regardless of order; and who are irregular in any way. The word would include any violation of the rules of Christ in any subject." The underlining above is mine (J.L.). I usually do not resort to Lexicons or Commentaries unless I want to check on what I already suspect is the truth. In this case the "disorderly" (insubordinate) conduct is a general classification that was meant to have many applications. In the immediate case the apostle Paul will give it a direct application to the disorder of "idleness." (We will see in a moment where some prefer to translate the word as "idle.")

Concerning its use the Thayer Lexicon says the same, "Disorderly, out of ranks (often so of soldiers), irregular, inordinate, deviating from the prescribed order or rule." W. E. Vine says, "It was especially a military term, denoting not keeping rank, insubordinate...used in II Thess. of those in the church who refuse to work, and became busybodies...out of rank, undisciplined." W.E. Bullinger says, "Not keeping the ranks as of soldiers, not in one's place, out of order; hence, neglectful of duties."

Anyone who has been in the military knows what "Disorderly Conduct" means. It simply means to not follow the military code of rules, whatever they may be. The same is thought by many to be basically true here in the Thessalonian letters. A Christian can be "disorderly" in any number of ways.

However, in this case, in Paul's second letter he clearly applied it directly to the disorder of not working and becoming a "busybody" in verse 11 of chapter three. Indeed, even in the Greek world it has been discovered that this word was sometimes used of that particular disorder of "idleness," especially of school students who were lazy in their studies. As a consequence, some newer translations prefer to render *every* use of the word in these two letters by that meaning—"idleness." The Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon gives the first definition, but indicates the other translation of "idleness" is permissible, if not preferable in some cases. There seem to be two opinions now among Greek scholars on Paul's intention, and therefore the proper translation. However, the more literal

translations of the Bible (as the New American Standard Bible), and the actual Lexicons that I have quoted do not do this, because “idleness” is only one variation of “disorderly” conduct, and we should not presume that Paul meant this in all cases. In addition, there is actually another Greek word that specifically denotes “inactivity or idleness” and that is *argos*, which word is not used in these texts. Consequently, the more literal rendering as “unruly” or “disorderly” would seem more desirable, because that is its first and literal meaning. It also allows Paul to directly apply it to the specific disorder among the Thessalonians of “idleness.”

Proof of Application to other Disorders

Nevertheless, any way you translate that particular word, the spiritual logic would of necessity allow, if not demand, that there are many other disorders of the same magnitude that would bring this kind of discipline among the Christian communities. I have stated in the past that *thievery* for instance would probably be considered a worse crime. If a brother persisted in thievery without repentance, he no doubt should also be avoided. A brother with a *violent temper* resulting in fights would be in the same category. A *fowl-mouthed* individual who could not control his filthy language would be a disgraceful testimony and should be avoided. I state these examples because in my experience we faced disciplining certain brothers with these disorders.

Now a few individuals, of whom I know, steadfastly insist that this passage cannot be applied to any other person, other than the one who was “idle” in this context. We positively know, however, that this claim is not true because the Apostle Paul, himself, applies the very same discipline, “do not keep company with (Greek, *sunanamignumi*)” (II Thess. 3:14), to **at least six other categories** of sinful carnality. In I Corinthians 5:11 Paul says—“do not keep company with (Greek, *sunanamignumi*) anyone named a brother, who is *sexually immoral*, or *covetous*, or an *idolater*, or a *reviler*, or a *drunkard*, or an *extortioner*...” Paul continues to mention other variations in II Corinthians 12:21 of “*uncleanness*,” “*fornication*” and “*lewdness*” as likewise deserving judgment. All these conditions are obvious “disorders” deserving of the same discipline. I don’t think anyone would consider the apostle Paul as some quack preacher who simply wants to usurp ungodly authority over God’s people by making application to other sinful conditions by the same judgment. This is too elementary to miss.

Therefore, I and others have made applications of this passage to other disorders: first of all, by the simple fact of the meaning of the word “disorder” as was exemplified by the Greek scholars above; secondly, by the spiritual logic of other equal, if not worse, sinful conditions that would demand such a judgment; and thirdly, by the very fact that Paul, himself, who gave the inspired command, applied the same judgment to many other disorders.

“Withdraw From & Mark”

The command (verse 6) to “*withdraw from*” certain disorderly brethren is herein first given to the Church as the body of Christ. Paul will repeat this command from another perspective in verse 14. In verse 14 Paul puts on notice the offending brothers, that if they do not respond positively, “*obey our word by this epistle*,” the assembly should “*note* (lit. *mark*) *that person*” and “*do not keep company with him*.” The immediate purpose, as far as the offending brother is concerned, is to “*shame*” him.

In Church Discipline there are two different words used that are normally translated “to mark.” The first one, and the only time that it is used, is in this passage. It is the Greek word *semeioo*, and it literally means “a sign, token or mark.” The understanding in this passage is as Henry Alford says, “put a mark on him, by noticing him for the sake of avoidance.” In Romans 16:17 and Philippians 3:17 the Greek word *skopeo* is used, and it means “to look at, watch, take note of.” This is used for either good or bad purposes. It is used to observe a person’s good qualities and emulate him, or to take note of a person who is dangerous and avoid him.

The Authority of Christ

Another important principle to remember is that Paul issued this command of “withdrawal” from the “disorderly” brothers “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (verse 6). The name of Christ is also repeated in the exhortation of verse 12. This clearly means that such discipline is actually Christ’s discipline and not merely the church’s. It is done under the authority of the Head of the Church. It, in effect, becomes Christ’s judgment. Herein, we have a reminder of what was learned from the Hebrew Scriptures, that proper godly judgment is actually the judgment of God and/or Christ—Exo. 32:26; Deut. 1:17; Deut. 19:17; II Chron. 19:6-8 and Matthew 18:18-20.

Another deduction can be made in light of this being done in the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. How do we consider members of the assembly who would refuse to execute this judgment? The answer is quite simple—they stand in “Contempt of Court,” to use a familiar expression in our society. Men are prosecuted for this just as they would be for any other crime. In this case they are standing in “Contempt of Christ’s Court.” Disobedience to Jesus Christ, on a matter as bold and specific as this, always brings condemnation. In fact, disobedience to the command of Jesus Christ to execute the judgment is no less a crime than that of “idleness.” In fact one brother has admitted, “The failure of anyone to obey this truth could contribute to the slothful man’s sin and could allow the moocher to continue to eat his food for naught.” In other words, the individual who would, for whatever reason, choose to not obey this command, given “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” would bring himself under the same condemnation for “contributing” to the sin. Again, an important lesson should be remembered from what we read in the Hebrew Scriptures. God set His face against those who would not execute His judgments (Lev. 20:4, 5). Unless Israel separated from Korah, Dathan and Abiram they would also be consumed in their judgment (Num. 16:24-27). The man who acts presumptuously and will not heed a judgment would himself be subject to the penalty meted out to the other person (Deut. 17:8-13). A whole tribe in Israel was nearly lost because they would not execute judgment (Judges 19, 20 & 21). We will say more in this regard when we discuss I Corinthians 5.

A “Brother” not an “Enemy”

The following verse (15), “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother,” is understood by myself and most commentators that I have read as stating what should be the underlying attitude of the assembly toward the person. By this discipline they are not to consider him disrespectfully as an unsaved man—an “enemy,” but rather respect him as an offending “brother.” This is the attitude by which the “admonition” of “have no company with” is to be given. Actually, this verse is parallel

with Paul’s words to the Corinthians in their discipline of those listed as disorderly (see I Cor. 5:11-13). In that passage Paul again distinguishes that this judgment is not to be administered as to unsaved people, “those who are *outside*,” but upon “those who are *inside*.” “Those who are inside” are the same as “a brother” in II Thess. 3:15. In the Corinthian passage, as well as the Thessalonian passage, there is no hint that this consideration of the offending person as an “insider” or a “brother” is actually an invitation for the saints to continue in an ongoing communication with the person.

Note closely the parallel between—

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|---|-----|---|
| II Thess. 3:14 &15 | and | I Cor. 5:11-13. |
| 1.) “do not <u>keep company with</u> ...” (14) | | “not to <u>keep company with</u> ...” (11) |
| 2.) “do not count him as an <u>enemy</u> ” (15) | | “those who are <u>outside</u> ...” (12) |
| 3.) “as a <u>brother</u> ...” (15) | | “those who are <u>inside</u> ...” (12) |
| 4.) “ <u>admonish</u> ...” (15) | | “ <u>judge</u> ...” (12) |
| 5.) In fulfillment of the initial command to “ <i>withdraw from</i> ” (6) | | “Therefore ‘ <i>put away from yourselves the evil person</i> ’.” (13) |

In both cases the judgment is the same (1). In both cases the offending one is not to be treated as an “enemy” or an “outsider” (2). In both cases the offending one is to be considered a “brother” or an “insider” (3). In both cases the “admonishment” **IS** the “judge(ment)” (4). In conclusion, in both cases the assembly is to “withdraw from” or to “put away from yourselves the evil person” so disciplined (5). Please remember, this action, as stated in I Cor. 5:13, is a quote from the oft repeated command initially made in the Law of Moses—Deut. 13:5; 17:7; 17:12; 21:21 & 22:21.

So, I say again, by no stretch of the imagination is verse 15 of II Thessalonians 3 to be interpreted as permission for some to make a continuing, ongoing effort to visit and “contact” the brother and reason with him about his sin. That has already been done. In this immediate case, the offending brother or brothers were *originally* admonished when Paul was first there in their midst (verse 10), again a *second time* with Paul’s first letter (I Thess. 4:11), and now for a *third time* with this second letter (verse 14). If that is not sufficient to bring about a change in their conduct, then the next admonition is in the form of “*withdrawal from*” and “*do not keep company with*.” That action of avoidance is itself the ongoing admonition or judgment upon the sinning brother. Hopefully he will repent when he realizes his own brethren refuse to associate with him.

Furthermore, there is very obviously not a single word in verse 15 to instruct the Christians to reestablish “communications” with this brother, and to “admonish him” further by “reasoning and constructive admonition,” and “to help restore him to usefulness and respectability,” as one contentious brother has futilely argued. Such action would be a fundamental contradiction to the command to “withdraw from” and “to have no company with.” The plain facts are that such an offending brother has already rejected every bit of spiritual reasoning and admonition that was given to him. That is the very reason for the saints to now avoid him. One would have to redefine “withdraw from” to actually mean “*go communicate with*,” and “have no company with” to actually mean “*go to him with reasonings and constructive admonitions*.”

Furthermore, Paul states in the Corinthian passage that the saints are not “to eat with such a person,” and the saints were to “put away from yourselves the evil person.” Now if you think that all these statements—“withdraw from” (I Thess 3:6), “have no company with” (3:14 & I Cor. 5:11), “not even to eat with” (5:11), and to “put away from yourselves” (5:13) all add up to actually mean “go communicate with reasonings and constructive admonitions, to help restore him to usefulness and constructive respectability,” then you are rebellious and have perverted God’s orders.

Concluding Remarks

In saying all of the above, I do not mean that if the assembly heard of some extenuating circumstances in the offending brother, or heard that there may be a change in his spiritual attitude and condition, they should not be more than ready to make inquiry as to possible reconciliation, because they most certainly should. Since one purpose of the discipline was to “shame” the person, if there is any indication that this action has been successful in that regards, then of course, we should be ready to explore the possibility of restoration. In the case of the serious sin recorded in I Corinthians 5, there was evidence of true repentance, for which reason Paul encouraged his restoration.

There is another consideration concerning the application of verse 14—“And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him...” It is true that some have taken the position in the past that this verse is actually directly applicable to any person that would not execute this discipline upon the unruly brother. For instance, a very popular book on Church Discipline (one of the few books on that subject—*A Guide To Church Discipline*, by J. C. Laney, 1985), and one which was highly endorsed by several very large Evangelical Churches and their pastors, took verse 14 to mean, “Anyone who did not honor the disciplinary measures would also be subjected to discipline!” (page 65). This was also actually stated at an earlier date by some brethren (myself included), until we found out it was in all probability not accurate. Most expositors point out, and I believe this is true, that verse 14 is actually Paul’s direct admonition to the offending persons and not to the assembly. This correction does not change the fact, as was brought out on page 25, that those who would refuse to implement the discipline, would themselves be in danger of such discipline.

I Corinthians 5:1-8

When one reads the 5th chapter of I Corinthians, he must remember that there are actually **two different sections** in this chapter that deal with discipline. The first one is this section of verses 1-8. This section is unique. The discipline here is characterized by the deserving of death because of a very serious immorality. The second section is verses 9-13 where many other disorders are listed that require avoidance as the punishment, but are not of the same magnitude. We will comment upon these others separately.

- (1) “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife!
- (2) 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.

(6) Your glorying is not good. *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

(7) Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

(8) Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Interpretation

There is one thing very clear from Paul’s overall remarks and that is that Paul is as much disturbed by the neglectful conduct of the whole assembly as he is by the particular sin of the individual specified. That the nature of the sin is heinous enough seems to be equaled by the prideful indifference of the assembly. This is precisely further reason why the discipline must be administered by a general gathering of the whole assembly rather than something a few individuals are assigned to do. Indeed, when we come to read Paul’s statements in his second letter to the Corinthians, we will see as much joy in Paul concerning the “repentance” of the whole assembly as for the apparent restoration of the individual who was initially guilty. In this regard notice the following—

(II Cor. 7:8-) “For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it ; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for awhile.

(9) Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

(10) For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

(11) For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: what **diligence** it produced in you, what **clearing** of yourselves, what **indignation**, what **fear**, what **vehement desire**, what **zeal**, what **vindication!** In all things you proved yourselves to be **clear** in this matter.

Please keep in mind that this “repentance” spoken of by the apostle Paul is not the individual’s repentance who had sinned, but the assembly’s repentance for indifference to the horrible condition among them. Furthermore Paul adds—

(12) Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of *him who had done the wrong*, nor for the sake of *him who suffered wrong*, **but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.”**

Here we have three of the reasons for Church judgment. One reason is, of course, to discipline the individual who sinned. Another reason is to give justice on behalf of the

one who suffered the wrong. But, in this context, the primary reason, Paul asserts, is to demonstrate their care for the whole assembly as godly shepherds.

Paul writes earlier in II Corinthians 2:9 a more primary reason for this Church discipline, “*For to this end (purpose) I also wrote (in the first letter), that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.*” In other words, one of the most important reasons Paul called upon the Corinthian assembly to execute such judgment was to “TEST” their obedience to his apostleship, and beyond him, to Christ, Who ordered the judgment, as indicated in I Cor. 5:4 above, “with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.” In light of this importance we would ask, “What do you think it would mean to **fail this test?**” It would mean the apostasy of the assembly, to be sure! It would also mean their failure to possess all seven of the godly qualities of verse 11 listed above—“diligence, clearing, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal and vindication.”

It is not at all surprising, in light of the apostasy that exists today among most professing Christian groups, that failure in Church Discipline is a primary characteristic. Indeed, even among some of whom I know, who make a very clear profession of knowledge about what true Christianity is all about, have actually wanted to continue their association and fellowship with or without conformity to such discipline. They have contended in the past that God does not demand that everybody in the whole assembly, of necessity, must participate in the discipline. They have cited the verse in II Corinthians that says, “This punishment which was inflicted by the *majority* is sufficient for such a man” (2:6). Because of this translation they argue that God never expected every single person in the assembly—but only the “majority”—to impose the discipline.

This type of argument should arouse our suspicions on the face of it. First it ignores the fact which we have just looked at—II Cor. 2:9—that this discipline is a “TEST” for the whole assembly, not just for the majority! Secondly they ignore the fact that failure in this “TEST” marks disobedience to Paul and to Christ for anyone who disobeys, not just for the “majority.” Thirdly, they think nothing of the chaos caused when some individuals still associate with the sinning individual. They seemingly don’t want to realize the encouragement this association gives the man in his sins. Try to operate a regular family in that manner. See what happens when a mother or father disciplines a child and all the others go and cuddle him instead. Fourthly, they should not be misled by this particular translation. In a given context this might be an acceptable translation. For instance, in one of our elections, the candidate with the majority of votes wins. However, this is not the way Paul is using the word. In this particular context where this Greek word *pleion* (the many or the more part) is used, most all commentators say it is understood literally “as meaning the whole, the more part, or the many, are to execute the discipline, in contrast to a few.” See, *Albert Barnes Notes; Jamesson, Fauset & Brown; The New Bible Commentary*, etc. Fifthly, most will note that in this context the word stands as the perfect compliment to the command in I Corinthians 5:4 that the church “*being assembled*” executes the discipline. Therefore, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, will summarize—“this discipline was made by the Church ‘as a whole’ rather than the majority.” The Oxford-Cambridge, *New English Bible*, also in this context, gives the proper translation as referencing—“the general assembly.”

It has also been asked, in the midst of one discussion on this subject, “why should anyone want to contend for the privilege of disobeying the apostle and the Head of the

Church?” There must be an ulterior motive! Thankfully, Paul indicates that the whole assembly acted upon the discipline in chapter 7, verse 11.

The Principle of Leaven

To illustrate the vital necessity of the assembly’s collective participation in this judgment, Paul quotes a basic principle from the Law of Moses—“*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump*” (I Cor. 5:6, 7).

This Biblical illustration that Paul gives is clear and simple. In this case “sin” is exemplified by “leaven.” There is bad “leaven” (serious immorality) in the Corinthian assembly. If this “leaven” (sin) is not purged out, then the “whole” assembly will be in a “leavened” condition of countenancing such immorality. This is another reason why this “TEST” was so important to the Corinthians. In other words, the “whole” assembly will be in the same condition as the “little” part. Apparently Paul believed in “Dominoes in Effect.” That is, he believed what happens to one will characterize all, if not caught and arrested. And conversely, we might add, Paul believes in “Dominoes in Discipline.” If one needs to be disciplined, it follows that all who countenance that sin are evilly affected by it, and will need to be disciplined as well.

As double emphasis, Paul speaks of the observance of the Passover (verses 7 & 8). Of particular importance in the observance of Passover, “ALL leaven” is to be purged out of the households of the children of Israel. In compliance with this law, each Israelite characteristically cleansed his whole house in preparation for Passover. They made sure they got “all” the leaven out. This is what Paul is stressing. The sin of the one has the effect of contaminating the whole household if not extracted. The “little” must be expelled that the “whole” household will not be disqualified from the observance of the feast. Now, in the case of the Corinthian assembly (or household), the “little” must be purged out, lest the “whole” assembly (household) be found in the same condition as the one. The assembly as a household would be disqualified from the spiritual observance of the feast if they countenanced such “wickedness” (verse 8).

Other Examples

This same principle is taught when a person becomes “unclean” by virtue of some disease. In Numbers 5:1-3 we have that principle of separation spelled out—

“And the LORD spoke to Moses saying: (2) ‘Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a dead corpse.

(3) You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell.’”

The principle is the same as the law pertaining to leaven in the observance of Passover. The whole “*camp*” in which “*I dwell*,” God said, would be “*defiled*” if the one with the particular disease is not placed outside the camp. If the whole were so defiled then God, Himself, steps “outside the camp.” We actually saw this happen in Exo. 33:7-11 after Israel’s rebellion at the foot of Mount Sinai. After God renewed the Covenant with Israel and the tabernacle was constructed, God returned to the center of the camp.

Applying this to the problem in the Corinthian assembly, we would observe that the sinning brother must be extracted lest the whole assembly, where God dwells, becomes contaminated.

The law regarding what is called “The water of purification for sin” is yet another illustration. This is found in Numbers 19:1-22. “Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died” is ritually “unclean.” That person must have “the water of purification” applied to him. This has to do with ritual “sin” or “uncleanness.” If the person who has touched a dead body “does not purify himself, (he) defiles the Tabernacle of the LORD. That person shall be cut off from Israel.” Likewise, “*whatsoever the unclean person touches shall be unclean.*” In other words, anyone who comes in contact with such a person, who has not yet applied the “water of purification,” is automatically constituted as “unclean” as well. All such must have the “water of purification for sin” applied to them, or else be cut off from Israel. I don’t know how the principle could be any plainer in light of these Scriptural illustrations from the realm of ritual uncleanness.

Indeed, the prophet Haggai was inspired to use this very principle to demonstrate the spiritual uncleanness of the whole nation of Israel in his day—

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Ask now the priests for a ruling:

If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?’ And the priests answered and said, ‘**No!**’

Then Haggai said, ‘If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?’ And the priests answered and said, ‘**It will become unclean!**’

Then Haggai answered and said, ‘*So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,*’ declares the LORD, ‘*And so is every work of their hands; and what they offer is unclean.*’”

Just as the remnant nation of Israel was considered unclean in Haggai’s day so it was in the day when Jesus Christ visited the nation—it was considered by God to be in an unclean condition. That is precisely why John the Baptist was sent on a mission of baptismal “purification.” John’s baptism was twofold. First the nation was in need of ritual cleansing by baptism with water. But most importantly, the nation was in need of inward spiritual cleansing, and thus John “preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Only the self-righteous religious refused to submit to “God’s counsel” (Luke 7:30) for their purification—both in the flesh nor in the heart.

In a similar way, many Christians today refuse to recognize the contaminating effect upon themselves and their assemblies, brought about by their hypocritical indifference towards sin, when it is left to go unpunished and undisciplined.

Illustrations From Cases of Actual Judgment

As we stated before, there are some individuals today who slanderously refer to this teaching as the “Dominoes in Marking” doctrine. They hold it in contempt. In further response to them, I have pointed out actual judgment cases recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures which demonstrate the principle. Here are five of them—

- (1) Leviticus 20:1-5, wherein the passage speaks of the judgment that should be administered against the man that offers his children to Molech. Then it adds, “And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendents to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against *that man and against his family*; and *I will cut him off from his people...*”
- (2) Numbers 16:24-27, wherein God commanded all the people of Israel to separate themselves “from the tents of these wicked men! (Korah, Dathan and Abiram). Touch nothing of theirs, *LEST YOU BE CONSUMED IN ALL THEIR SINS.*”
- (3) Numbers 16:41-50, wherein all those who bemoaned the death of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were *themselves* destroyed. Were it not for the intervention of Moses and Aaron, “who stood between the dead and the living,” there would have been the near termination of the nation of Israel. As it were, “*those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident.*”
- (4) Deuteronomy 17:8-13, wherein God explicitly issues His judgment against the man who acts “*presumptuously*,” and will not act on the judgment decreed by the judges against another person who initially sins. Apparently God considers this act of contempt against a proper judgment as serious enough for the death penalty—“that man shall die.”
- (5) Judges 19-21, This is the case where the whole tribe of Benjamin was nearly destroyed because they refused to turn over a few certain “perverted men” for judgment. At that time this amounted to over 25,000 men besides women and children. In addition, the whole nation of Israel suffered the loss of over 40,000 men. This was apparently a judgment from God upon the whole nation for allowing such a condition to exist within their borders. In addition the occupants of one city who had not joined in the discipline of Benjamin were totally destroyed. We are not given the number of the occupants of that city. In all, *an estimate of some 100,000 is easily within sight.* (For those who count “dominoes,” that is a considerable number.)
- (6) Remember the oft repeated command—“*all the people*” shall have their part in implementing the discipline. See again Lev. 24:13-16; Num. 15:32-36; Deut. 13:9, 11; Deut. 17:7 & Deut 21:21.

In conclusion, I sincerely believe that this opposition to the so-called “Dominoes in Marking” teaching is really a devious facade to the real issue. The real issue is, *they are sympathetic to those being disciplined in the first place*, but they don’t want to openly admit it. So they hide behind the appearance of just being innocently non-committal.

In any discipline in which I had a part in, I wanted to make sure there were no innocent people who did not know or understand what was happening. Therefore, I do not practice the marking of “innocent” brethren. On the other hand, when I have found that others are standing with the one being disciplined, I have not hesitated, in light of the Biblical principles above, to warn them of the same judgment.

The Death Penalty

Unlike the theocracy of the nation of Israel, wherein the death penalty was usually implemented by stoning in the presence of witnesses, the Church had no such instructions. In the revelation concerning the nature of the Church which is Christ's body, it is clearly revealed that this new entity is merely a "called-out company of people," living for Jesus Christ, in the midst of whatever national entity might exist. The self-government of the local Church congregations did not mix with the official civil government of the nations. The Church was clearly instructed to obey the rulers that be, and to remember "let every soul be subject to the governing authorities...for he does not bear the sword in vain" (Rom. 13:1-7). In contrast, the Church had at its disposal "the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17) in its judicial matters. It was only Roman Catholicism, the Greek Orthodox, and a few Protestant groups that tried to institute a national theocracy like Israel.

This does not mean, however, that there were not cases of premature "death" being implemented as a miraculous or supernatural chastisement allowed by God, for there most certainly were such. Shortly after the Church had been born, the lifeless bodies of Ananias and Sapphira were a stark reality to the sin of publicly lying about their donations to the general fund at this very crucial stage of Church history. Needless to say, "great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11). This group of believers in Jesus Christ was no ordinary religious club that people would want to join. In addition, a year or so later Peter would say to one Simon, who had been a sorcerer and had professed faith in Christ, "Your money *perish* with you" (Acts 8:20). Simon thought he could regain his prominence by purchasing the power to perform miracles. Peter called upon him to repent. Simon, in return asked for Peter's prayer that this (perishing) might not happen to him. We are not told whether or not Simon died, but nevertheless, that judgment was expressed upon him by Peter. The apostle Paul tells us in I Corinthians 11:20 that some of the assembly had become sick and some had died prematurely because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper. The apostle John speaks of the "sin unto death" among Christians in I John 4:16 & 17. Here in I Corinthians 5:5, the nature of this young man's sin was such that the chastisement of God was to allow him to be "delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh." This is similar in nature to Paul's words in I Timothy 1:20 concerning certain blasphemers whom he had "delivered unto Satan."

We can be quite sure that the miraculous aspect of this type of discipline ceased with the demise of the apostles and the close of the transition period in the early church. However, there is no indication that premature death, as a chastening from God, has ceased to exist. There are brethren who have personally believed that their approaching death was directly due to certain sin in their lives.

Restoration

The "sorrow" of this young man is an opportunity for Paul to express a godly love that was the motivation for the discipline, and the conveyance of forgiveness to him. II Corinthians 2:3-11—

- (3) "And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence

in you all that my joy is the joy of you all.

(4) For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

(5) But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe.

(6) This punishment which was inflicted by the many is sufficient for such a man,

(7) so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.

(8) Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

(9) For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

(10) Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ,

(11) lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

As I noted at the very beginning of this Bible study, “love” (verse 4) for the church was Paul’s primary motivation for the discipline. In addition, we have also already taken note of verse 6, that the “majority,” as is translated in some newer Bibles, does not mean that a “minority” did not have part in the discipline.

Of note to me in this case is the mention of “Satan” once again. Apparently, the fact that the young man fell into the trap of Satan in the immorality, caused God to allow Satan to potentially afflict his very death (I Cor. 5:5). But now, upon the repentance of this person, his life was spared, and Paul would warn of the necessity of conveyance of forgiveness so that once again, Satan could not take advantage of severe depression in his soul. Satan seems ready to attack us from every angle and be successful, were it not for God’s intervention on our behalf.

I Corinthians 5:9-13

(9) “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

(10) Not altogether with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of this world.

(11) But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is *sexually immoral*, or *covetous*, or an *idolater*, or a *reviler*, or a *drunkard*, or an *extortioner*—not even to eat with *such a person*.

(12) For what have I to do with judging those who are outside? Do not you judge those who are inside?

(13) But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person.’”

In this place, which is the second section of chapter 5 dealing with the principle of Church judgment, Paul lists a variety of different categories of sinfulness that would warrant the disciplinary action of avoidance if the brothers are non-repentant after being faced with the guilt of these carnalities. All these would seem to be either more serious sins, or else of equal seriousness, with that expressed by Paul in the case of those who are “idle” and refuse to work (II Thess. 3). Nevertheless, they all have the same consequence in judgment—“have no company with” (II Thess. 3:14 & I Cor. 5:13). In addition in this case, Paul expresses “*not even to eat with such a person.*” As I have pointed out before, the nature of the discipline in this section of I Corinthians 5 places it in the same category of that discipline to be administered in II Thessalonians 3. In other words, when I say the judgment of I Corinthians 5 is the same as that in II Thessalonians 3, I am not talking about I Cor. 5:1-8; that particular judgment stands as a case by itself.

Notice also that verse 13 contains a quote from a statement that is used several times in the book of Deuteronomy in judgment matters—“put away from yourselves the evil, or the evil person”—Deut. 13:5; 17:7; 17:12; 21:21 & 22:21. This adds confirmation to the fact that the principle of judgment as used in the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is generally exemplified in the Hebrew Scriptures. It also further confirms the fact that such judgment is the final action towards the non-repentant person. As in the Hebrew Scriptures, after this action is done, you don’t go out after this person to further communicate or negotiate with him. This terminates your efforts to help the person.

Later in *II Corinthians 12:20-13:4* Paul indicates that there are still some among the Corinthians who have not complied with these admonitions.

(20) “For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, back-bitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults;

(21) lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and *have not repented* of the ***uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness*** which they have practiced.

(13:1) This will be the third time I am coming to you. ‘*By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.*’

(2) I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again ***I will not spare***—

(3) ***since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me***, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

(4) For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.”

These are certainly very sober admonitions coming from the pen of the apostle of Jesus Christ. Some would think Paul was a hardened dictator to say some of the things he says here. But just the opposite is true. Paul is expressing his heart’s attitude against wickedness and the pride of some at Corinth who scorned his ministry. The Head of the Church had given Paul unique authority and Paul was not about to modestly shrug it off.

The execution of proper discipline among the prideful Corinthians is, above everything else, a display of “*Christ speaking in him.*” When a minister of Christ knows and sees the truth of what should be done in a given situation, and because of the unpopularity of discipline or false modesty, fails to execute it, he certainly is not displaying the authority of Christ, but rather his preference for popularity and acceptance among the carnal.

Romans 16:17 & 18

(17) “Now I urge you, brethren, *note* those who *cause divisions* and *offenses*, contrary to the *doctrine which you learned*, and *avoid them*.

(18) For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies (affections), and by *smooth words* and *flattering speech* deceive the hearts of the simple.”

The Interpretation

There are two ingredients mentioned here that believers should consider like they would infectious diseases—“*divisions*” and “*offenses.*” Of all the evil problems the Corinthian assembly had, the one on the forefront of Paul’s concern were the “*divisions*” that were festering among them (I Cor. 1:10-13 & 3:1-4). Division can be deadly to the testimony of Christ especially when developed into open sects and schisms. “*Offenses*” from the Greek word *skandalon* is sometimes rendered as the idea of placing a “*stumbling block*” or “*an occasion to fall*” in our brother’s path, as in Romans 14:13.

“*Divisions*” and “*offenses*” are clearly internal problems in assembly life. Such problems normally do not originate by false prophets on the outside who want to destroy the Church. Some have contended that this problem in Romans 16 is actually talking about an attack by “*false prophets*” who preach “*another gospel.*” I do not deny that this would be included in what Paul is saying. However, I say again, one should keep in mind that the unsaved “*false prophets*” are primarily attacking the Church from the outside, whereas “*division*” in the Church is caused by INTERNAL forces, not EXTERNAL. Romans 16:17 & 18 is talking about their dealing with the problem of “*division and offenses*” from within the congregation.

Also we need to remember that we all may have differences on various subjects in the process of our Christian association, but we should never cause sinful division over them. We should be able to discuss our differences in a respectable manner. Quite often, the attitude we manifest is far worse than the difference we are discussing. When factious attitudes are dissipated one can better evaluate the subject in question. Sometimes we must let a subject rest until such time as we have more information in order to clarify it. And sometimes we must allow a subject to rest until such time as our brethren recognize the truth on the matter. We must never compromise truth, but at the same time we must spiritually evaluate the consequence of imposing that truth upon those not prepared at a given time to accept it.

In the book of Romans itself, Paul has given many teachings for the salvation, edification, guidance and separation of the saints in their earthly sojourn. These truths can be added to all the other information the Roman saints already had. Those who cause “*divisions*” and “*offenses*” contrary to any of these teachings are to be “*noted*” for the sake of “*avoidance.*” Those who do such things are “*not serving Christ,*” even though

they may profess to be Christ's servants. It is their own self-interests ("bellies") they are serving. They often disguise their purpose by "smooth words and flattering speech."

The basis for knowing who is really divisive and offensive is not to watch what the majority may do in a given case. This can be dangerous. Moses said, "don't follow a multitude to do evil" (Exo. 23:2). Nor is the basis for determining who is causing division and offenses just listening to leadership. The leadership themselves may be causing division. The basis for determining just who is causing the problems is that one must know what "the doctrine" is that has been given to us by Divine revelation. If we don't know what the doctrine or teaching is that God has given to us, we could never know who is deviating from it. This is precisely why Paul exhorted the saints to "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves" (II Cor. 13:5). And again in I Thess. 5:21, "Prove (or test) all things; hold fast what is good." "The faith once delivered to the saints" should be "earnestly contended for" (Jude 3).

Other Examples of This Passage

We saw that when Paul wrote his very first inspired letter of I Thessalonians, he concluded it with an admonition to "warn the unruly" (5:14). This, of course, meant in particular any who were unruly regarding the exhortation to be busy working with their own hands (4:11), as Paul specified within the letter. The second letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians had only three chapters, but the last chapter was primarily devoted to the disciplinary action the assembly should take against any who would not obey the instructions in that very letter (4:14). Paul pointedly told the Corinthian saints that he wrote the first letter to see "if they were obedient in all things" (II Cor. 2:9) written in that first letter. In addition, when he wrote II Corinthians he closed with a very sober warning to expect judgment when he came (II Cor. 12:20-13:4) concerning the sins specified in that very letter. *Likewise*, when Paul concluded the book of Romans here in the 16th chapter, he gave this very sober admonition concerning the discipline of professed believers who would "cause divisions" and "offences" contrary to the doctrine which they had "learned." Most certainly, like in all the other letters, "the doctrine they learned" was meant to include the well formulated body of truth they learned in that exact inspired treatise. The very fact that Paul placed these admonitions at the end of his letters is indicative of the fact that he intended the body of material he gave to be obeyed, and consequently warned about disobedience and those who might in any way cause divisions over them.

Example of Division

One can cause division over any subject or passage of Scripture—even over the interpretation of Romans 16:17 & 18. That is why Paul does not specify any issue in particular, but simply "contrary to the doctrine which they had learned" in general.

I have stated all the above in order to expose one individual who proudly and positively affirmed that these verses of Romans 16 are only talking about "noting" those "false prophets" who teach a "false gospel." He therefore affirmed that the "purpose" of these instructions is "not disciplinary" action within the congregation, but rather for them to "keep away from" the unsaved, primarily "Jews" in that day, who were "gospel perverters." In fact, the very one who gave this interpretation of the passage, charges us with crudely misapplying the passage in disciplinary matters. He furthermore allowed his

position to be the final climatic argument before he divisively walked away from an assembly of saints. This was the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back” in his mind. His arguments had been exposed by several ministering brethren, including myself. However, to him his arguments seemed to be the “icing on the cake” (from his heretical spirit). By these arguments he had poisoned the minds of some others with his “good words and flattering speech.” Some of those saints he walked away from, I for one, pled with him to not leave but to stay and discuss it with us. Our pleas were to no avail. Carnal Christians can “cause division” over any issue. This individual had many disagreements, but he left in finality over his interpretation of this very passage and actually became a prime example of what this passage is talking about; consequently he was finally “noted to be avoided” by his own assembly in compliance with this passage.

I Timothy 6:3-5

- (3) “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,
- (4) he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which comes envy, strife, reviling,
- (5) useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.”

The immediate context for this exhortation was Paul’s very practical admonition about servant and master relationships (verses 1 & 2). There were a lot of people, even among the saints, who would use their humanistic minds and argue for slaves to rebel against their masters. That is not the principle of the Christian ethic and of the teachings coming from the Head of the Church. Consequently, Christians are to withdraw from those teachers who would contradict and wrangle over clear issues. It is very surprising sometimes to observe contentious individuals, who actually never solve anything, but only seem to enjoy argument. We should not be a part with any of that attitude.

Titus 3:10 & 11

- (10) “**Reject a divisive** man after the *first* and *second* admonition,
- (11) knowing that such a person is *warped and sinning*, being *self-condemned*.”

The Greek word *hairesikos* is herein translated as a “divisive man.” The King James gave it a more literal transliteration of a “heretic.” A heretic is a divisive or schismatic person.

The Greek word *hairesis* denotes a sect or party split. It is translated “sect” five times in the King James (“*sect* of Sadducees” Acts 5:17; “*sect* of Pharisees” Acts 15:5; “*sect* of Nazarenes” Acts 24:5; “*sect* of our religion” Acts 26:5 and “this *sect*” Acts 28:22). One time it is rendered “which they call *heresy*” (Acts 24:14). In addition, the apostle Paul said “there must also be *heresies* among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest” (I Cor. 11:19). This meant that a divisive activity is also an occasion for making manifest those who are standing for truth. In other words, when

brethren see the clear teachings from the Word of God, they can also discern who is standing for that truth and who is not. In Gal. 5:20 “heresy” is listed along with such things as sexual immorality, idolatry, sorcery, etc., as “the works of the flesh.”

In particular, the Greek word *hairesis* is derived from the word that means “to choose,” or “a choice,” or “denoting an opinion.” In its negative aspect, it would mean a “self-willed opinion” which stands in opposition to “submission to the power of truth,” and this “leads to division and the formation of sects” (see W.E.Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). A heretic in the Church of Jesus Christ, therefore, is “an opinionated person who places his opinion above the Word of God.” By actively gaining support for his position, he brings about division.

The apostle Paul states here that such a person “is warped and sinning.” This presupposes that there is the true position or embodiment of truth that God has instituted. The heretic will deviate or be “warped” away from that position. In his sin he will often be “self-condemned.” In other words, he will contradict himself so as to expose his error. Such a person is, after the first and second admonition, to be rejected. This means he is to be rejected from the fellowship of the assembly.

In Summary From the Greek Scriptures

The Seven Examples of Church Discipline

1.) Matthew 18:15-20 Though primarily written for the Kingdom assembly there is a secondary application for the Church of Jesus Christ. It stresses a three step procedure leading up to a hearing before the assembly.

2.) II Thessalonians 3:6-15 Dealing with disorderly brethren whose idleness is a disgrace to the testimony of Christ.

3.) I Corinthians 5:1-8 Dealing with a serious case of immorality in an assembly that seemed to be oblivious to the shame.

4.) I Corinthians 5:9-13 Many other categories of sinfulness that would warrant Church discipline of avoidance.

5.) Romans 16:17 & 18 Dealing with brethren who would cause division and offenses contrary to the doctrine that has been learned by the church.

6.) I Timothy 6:3-5 Dealing with brethren who would teach contrary to the code of conduct inspired by the Lord Jesus Christ.

7.) Titus 3:10 & 11 Dealing with a heretic or divisive brother. Rejection after the first or second admonition.

Seven Individual Cases in The early Church

- 1.) Acts 5:1-11 Dealing with the case of Ananias and Sapphira, who were guilty of “lying to the Holy Spirit” at a very crucial time at the beginning of the Church.
- 2.) Acts 8:18-24 Dealing with the case of Simon, who had been a sorcerer and thought the miraculous power could be bought with money.
- 3.) Galatians 1:8,9; 5:10, 12 & 6:1 Dealing with the case of those who would turn the Gentile saints to practicing the Law and circumcision.
- 4.) I Timothy 1:20 Dealing with the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had been guilty of blasphemy.
- 5.) II Timothy 1:15 Dealing with the case of Phygellus and Hermogenes, who had turned away from Paul along with others from Asia.
- 6.) III John 9 & 10 Dealing with Diatrephes who rejected the apostle John and was shutting other saints away from the assembly life.
- 7.) Jude 4, 12, 13 & 16 Dealing with certain ungodly men who turned the grace of God into lewdness, denying the Lord Jesus Christ.

Seven Warnings of Future Divisive Men

- 1.) Acts 20:29-32 “Savage wolves” and men from among the shepherds themselves will speak perverse things, not sparing the flock.
- 2.) Philippians 3:17-19 Many who are and will be walking contrary to the example of Paul are to be noted as “enemies of the cross of Christ.”
- 3.) II Timothy 3:1-9 In the last days many will come who have a “form of godliness” only. They will lead away weak-minded gullible people.
- 4.) II Timothy 3:13, 14 Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse. But the saints should cling to the inspired truths they have learned.
- 5.) II Timothy 4:3,4 In the future men will turn to teachers who will “tickle the ears” and will also be turned aside to fables.
- 6.) II Peter 2:1-3 False teachers will come among the saints and bring in destructive heresies. They will have many followers.
- 7.) I John 4:1-6 False prophets have gone out into the world as a precursor to antichrist doctrines which are coming. We have the Spirit of truth to counter the error.

Seven Examples of Separation from Worldly and Religious Contamination

- 1.) II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 Saints are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, especially in religious systems.

- 2.) Ephesians 5:11,12 Saints are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.
- 3.) Hebrews 13:13 Saints are to step outside the religious camp that has apostatized and bear the reproach of Christ.
- 4.) II Timothy 2:20,21 Saints are to purge themselves from the vessels of dishonor so that they will be proper for the Lord's use.
- 5.) II Timothy 3:5 Saints are to separate themselves from the religious who merely have a form of godliness while they deny its power.
- 6.) II John 7, 9-11 Many deceivers have gone out into the world. Whoever does not abide in the doctrine of Christ should not be received by the saints.
- 7.) Revelation 18:4 The Saints, both now and of the Great Tribulation, should come out of the Mystery Babylon religious system.

Seven Examples of the Opportunity for Self-Defense

- 1.) John 7:51 "Does our Law judge a man before it hears him?" Though Christ was given this opportunity before the religious leaders and Pilate, He declined it—see Matthew 26:62 and 27:14.
- 2.) Acts 4:5-12 & 19,20 This is the case of Peter and John being allowed to speak before the Council.
- 3.) Acts 6:11-7:53 This is the case of Stephen being allowed to give a long message before the Council.
- 4.) Acts 21:40-22:21 This is the case of Paul being allowed to speak before an unruly mob who wanted to kill him.
- 5.) Acts 23:1-10 This is the first case where Paul was allowed to speak in his defense before the Council and the Roman authorities.
- 6.) Acts 24:1-21 This is the second time Paul was allowed to speak in his defense before both the religious leaders and the Roman authorities.
- 7.) Acts 25:1-12 & 16 This is the final time Paul was allowed to defend himself before some religious leaders and the Roman authority. The statement by the Roman authority is worthy of quoting (verse 16)—

"It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has the opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him."

Thus, it was the custom and statute of both the Law of Moses and the Roman government to allow for the principle of self-defense. How much more should this be true in the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ! But how surely it has been forgotten.

The Purposes for Church Discipline

From the seven examples of Church Discipline which we have studied I have gleaned various purposes for such discipline. Here are ten that I have found—

- 1.) To execute judgment upon those who sinned—I Cor. 5:2 & 12.
- 2.) To give relief to those who have suffered wrongfully—II Cor. 7:12.
- 3.) To shame and turn about the offender—II Thess. 3:12 & II Cor. 2:7.
- 4.) To test the Church's obedience to Christ's order—II Cor. 2:9.
- 5.) For maintaining assembly purity of conduct—I Cor. 5:7 & 13
- 6.) To instill fear and holiness in all—Acts 5:11 & I Tim. 5:20.
- 7.) To manifest proper love for the Church—II Cor. 2:4.
- 8.) To demonstrate the leader's care for the Church—II Cor. 7:12.
- 9.) To sometimes demonstrate those approved—I Cor. 11:19 & II Cor. 13:3.
- 10.) To maintain the unity of saints in purity of doctrine—Rom. 16:16-18
& Titus 1:13.

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