

# Church Discipline

By Leon King

Precious little appears these days on this topic. Necessity has required us to look again at the topic. We believe the things we have gained in study will be valuable to the Lord's people. The home and society in general cannot function properly without discipline. God instituted human government to punish evildoers in society and for protection of property. God instituted the home and gave principles for discipline in the Christian home. If these principles were followed diligently, there would be far fewer problems in the homes. Even so it is in the Lord's church. The Lord Jesus Christ instituted His church during His earthly ministry. He gave us principles through His personal teachings regarding the basics of discipline in the church. The Apostle Paul gave additional instructions in his letters to the gentile churches. If a man believes himself to be spiritual, he will acknowledge that the things Paul wrote are the commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37,38).

## Matthew 18:15-20

We will begin where the New Testament begins in speaking about discipline in the Lord's Church. First mention of discipline is in Matthew 18:15-20.

*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto*

*thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. -- Matthew 18:15-20.*

First, consider to whom these remarks are addressed. We must go back to the first verse of the eighteenth chapter to see. We find the Lord's disciples came to him with a question. He answered their question in verses three through ten. In verse eleven, He changed the subject to speak of the ninety and nine, which he tied to their question. In the fifteenth verse, the Lord turns to trespasses and forgiveness. The lesson continues through the end of the chapter. The Lord's address concerning discipline is found in the passage quoted above.

This passage has been referred to as the directions for discipline because of personal offenses. I am not sure that is entirely correct. There are some principles contained in this passage that seem to apply elsewhere. I will refer to that later in the article. Let us now examine the passage.

*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. -- Matthew 18:15.*

This is plain enough for any of us to understand. If someone sins against you, then go to that person (not another) and tell him what he has done. Do it alone; that is, just you and the brother who offended

you. Perhaps he did not know that he had done so. Perhaps he had succumbed to temptation and needed rebuke. Whatever the reason that he committed a trespass, you have not brought it to his attention. If he hears you and acknowledges the wrong, then you have gained your brother. To "gain thy brother," is to bring the matter to an end. The offense is resolved and that is the end of the matter. No other person needs to know about the incident.

*But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*  
-- Matthew 18:16.

Suppose the brother will not hear your rebuke. Suppose he will not acknowledge his wrong or will not repent of it. What does the offended brother do? Take one or two more brethren along with him and go back to the one who caused the offense to discuss the matter again. As it is discussed, every word is established. That is, the truth of the matter is established. At that point, there may be resolution when the other brethren point out to the offending brother that he is wrong.

*And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* -- Matthew 18:17.

If the brother who committed the trespass will not hear the other brethren, then the only alternative is to tell the matter to the church. This cannot be done unless all of the brethren are members of the church. The Lord's Church has no domain over people outside the body. Of course, this applies to people who are members of other churches. There must have been a church in existence when the Lord taught this to the disciples;

otherwise, the instruction to tell it to the church is makes no sense. The disciples were the church.

So, if the offending brother will not hear those who accompanied the offended brother, then tell it unto the church. The verse indicates some action on the part of the entire church to reclaim the brother and cause him to repent, else how could he neglect to hear the church? We have three steps, which have been taken to resolve the issue. First, the offended brother speaks to the offender alone. Secondly, the offended brother takes one or two more with him in order to establish every word. Thirdly, the matter is brought to the church. If the offender will not hear the church, the Lord said, *"let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."* *"...as an heathen man and a publican."* What does that mean? The meaning of these two classes of people is evident. A heathen man was a gentile or a non-Jew. The publican was a Jew who had given himself over to the ruling Roman Empire as a tax-collector. As a publican, he collected taxes from his own people - the Jews. Unto whom is the person to be as an heathen man and a publican? Unto the offended man. *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee"* (Greek - se'). Both the Greek and the King James are specific. "Se'" is accusative singular in the Greek. The English pronoun "thee" is always singular. The same is true of "thee" in verse seventeen. *... "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."* Dr. John Gill's commentary on verse seventeen agrees with this view.

**"others, of the church itself, and so the Ethiopic version renders it, 'the house of Christians'; to which it is objected, that as yet a Christian church was not formed: but what were the twelve apostles of the Lamb? They were the great congregation and church, in the midst of which Christ sung praise to his Father: and since the whole of this advice, and these excellent rules are given to them, and they are spoken of in the next verse, as having the**

**power of binding and loosing, they may well be thought to be meant here; and that the design of Christ is, to instruct them how to behave, in case of offence to one another; that the reproof should be first private, and if it did not succeed, to be made before one or two more; and if that did not do, the whole body was to be acquainted with it; and which rules hold good, and are to be observed by all Christian men and churches, in all ages: And besides, this is given, not as a rule to the church, but as advice to the offended person, how to behave towards the offender: after he has come under the cognizance, reproof, and censure of the church, he is to look upon him as the Jews did one that disregarded both private reproof by a man's self, and that which was in the presence of one or two more, 'a worthless friend', or neighbour; as a Gentile, with whom the Jews had neither religious nor civil conversation; and a "publican", or as *Munster's Hebrew Gospel* reads it, 'a notorious sinner', as a publican was accounted: hence such are often joined together, and with whom the Jews might not eat, nor keep any friendly and familiar acquaintance: and so such that have been privately admonished and publicly rebuked, without success, their company is to be shunned, and intimate friendship with them to be avoided."**

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. -- Matthew 18:18.

Now, the master says, "*Verily I say unto you,..*" (Greek: `umin, umin). The pronoun "you" is plural translated from the plural Greek word. So, The Lord is speaking of binding and loosing by a plural entity. I would connect this verse with John 20:22,23.

*And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are*

*remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

The binding is "what" and not "who." This means that the sin is remitted or retained because it is an action the Lord has given the church to administer. The binding and loosing have to do with the context. The context is trespass (sin) against a brother in the church. When the church has taken its collective action, then that action shall have been bound in heaven or shall have been loosed in heaven. There is no specific instruction to the church that the individual be dismissed. A lack of dismissal, though, on the part of the church, would result in two brethren remaining in the church at odds with each other. That would never contribute toward promoting the *"unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* In nearly fifty-three years as a believer and church member, I have never witnessed a censure of the church over a purely personal offense. I asked the church body whether or not they had - and they replied they had not. Doubtless, when censure comes as a result of a trespass of this nature, it will be labeled a disorderly walk on the part of the offending party. He should be summarily dismissed from the church until he repents and rights his wrong.

*Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. --*  
Matthew 18:19-20.

Agreement together on the part of the church when they are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus confirms that the action is completed. Lack of understanding or disagreement on the part of some in

the body does not negate the decision of the many (the majority). The Lord Jesus, the head of the church, is in the midst of such actions.

### **Romans 16:17-18**

Some think this passage has to do with church discipline. I believe the discipline for schismatics and heretics is based on Titus 3:10,11. In any case, it certainly pertains to those who try to influence the church through some devious, divisive method whether in order to create a schism or draw away disciples after them. This has to do with individuals, who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which the church has learned. Those within the church body should be dealt with as heretics when they try to introduce doctrines contrary to what the church has learned from the appointed pastor or pastors.

*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. -- Romans 16:17,18.*

At this point, the Apostle has come to the end of the letter to the Church at Rome. The whole of the sixteenth chapter is a series of short admonitions. This admonishment is no exception. Here, he warns the church about anyone who causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine, which they have learned. The doctrine (not doctrines) is a whole, interwoven statement of the faith delivered to the believers. The teaching of doctrine is the responsibility of pastors. The following passages are proof of this:

*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. --  
1 Timothy 4:13.*

*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in  
doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. --  
1 Timothy 4:16.*

*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke,  
exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. -- 2 Timothy 4:2*

In the books of First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus, the word "doctrine" is used sixteen times. Doctrine, then is an important part of the preacher's responsibility. These books are primarily written to preachers or pastors. Written to Timothy and Titus, they have application to any person who is put into the office of a Bishop (Pastor). I believe these books are specific instructions to pastors in which the vast majority of their specific pastoral duties are set forth.

Introduction of teachings, which oppose what has historically been taught to a church is disrupting to the church body and should be avoided. Persons who obviously teach and advocate things contrary should be identified and avoided. The word "mark" comes from the Greek word "skopeo (skopeo)" and means to mark, take heed, look on, look at, or consider. This Greek word appears six times in scripture with these various shades of meaning. I believe the Apostle is pointing to false teachers who try to introduce false teachings into the church by whatever means are available. In a day when false teachers abound and creep into houses by radio, television, tracts, newspapers, seminars, and other such methods,



such false teachers need to be identified by name and avoided. So it was in the days of the church at Rome.

## **1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:4-8**

These two passages belong together because they speak of the same person who was involved in an incident of fornication in the church at Corinth. Let us quote the passage verse-by-verse and study it as we go.

*It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. -- 1 Corinthians 5:1*

Paul introduces the subject by telling the church that there was a common report about the fornication, which existed among them. He went on to define the specifics of the fornication - that one should have his father's wife. Evidently, it was a subject, which others were discussing. The news of it had somehow come to the ears of the Apostle Paul. He is now addressing that issue specifically.

*And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. -- 1 Corinthians 5:2*

Here is a denunciation to the church for being "puffed up." This means they were acting proud or loftily when the exact reverse of that should be done. The church should be in mourning over this sin. Why? The church should be in mourning over this sin in their midst so that the person guilty of

the fornication might be taken away from among them. People often become "puffed up" by excusing sin in saying, "it's no worse than anybody else is doing." Such statements are usually general in nature without any specific foundation. In the Apostle's statement, he states that the person should be taken from among the church.

*For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. -- 1 Corinthians 5:3-5*

Verses three through five are one sentence, so we take them together. Paul had already made a decision concerning the guilty party - a judgment in accordance with the will of God. Because of that, he instructed the church to "*deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh,...*" "*...in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,...*" "*...when ye are gathered together.*" The meaning of this is clear. When the church gathers together - for the church is a church whether gathered or not - they were to deliver the person by the authority of (in the name of) the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul directs the church to act as a composite body in delivering this person over. What is the purpose? "*...the destruction of the flesh,...*" His body is to be delivered for destruction. Why? "*...that the spirit (the man's spirit) may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*"

*Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? -- 1 Corinthians 5:6*

Their glorying (state of being puffed up, proud) was not a good thing. He reasons that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Leaven is used in the scriptures as a type of sin - of evil. He is illustrating through common every-day terminology what leaven does to a lump. Surely the Corinthians knew that if leaven were introduced into a lump of bread dough that the whole lump would become leavened or affected by the leaven. Even so, this sin left to remain in the church would affect every part of the body. They were the body of Christ (12:27).

*Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. -- 1 Corinthians 5:7,8*

Verses seven and eight are one sentence. Purge out means to "remove from among." What was to be removed from among them? It was the "old leaven." What was that "old leaven?" It was the sin of fornication, which would affect the whole body. What was the objective? The goal was that ye, (the church) may be a new lump. All of the individual members at Corinth composed the body. Removal of the leaven would give them a renewed character commensurate with their unleavened status. What does that mean? Their sin was removed by the sacrifice of Christ. So, with the removal of the sin, the body was "unleavened." Christ is our Passover. Just as the Jews celebrated the Passover in remembrance of the sacrificial lamb, which was killed - even so, in the Church, we remember Jesus Christ, our Passover who was sacrificed to save us from death.

The feast keeping of the New Testament Church is not observance of the Passover, but the new feast, which was instituted for the Church by the

Lord Jesus Himself - the Lord's Supper. This is our only feast. It is done in remembrance of Him to show His death until He comes. How was the feast to be kept? It was not to be observed with the leaven of malice and wickedness for that must be removed. Neither was it to be kept with the spirit of malice nor the condoning of wickedness in any degree. The exact opposite is true. The feast was to be observed with the sincerity and truth untainted by sin. The picture is that the church was is unleavened. Sin outside or without the body doesn't affect it, but sin in the body certainly does. It is interesting that Paul introduces the subject of the Lord's Supper here. Undoubtedly, this is the key to understanding the command in verse eleven; *"with such an one no not to eat."*

*I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. -- 1 Corinthians 5:9,10*

The Apostle had written a former letter to this church with instructions not to company with fornicators. In these two verses, he explained what he had intended in the former letter. It was impossible for church members to be totally out of the company of people of the world who are fornicators, covetous, extortioners, or idolaters. He explained that the church members would have to leave the world for that to be true. He did not mean for them to leave the world nor to become isolated in a monastery.

*But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. -- 1 Corinthians 5:11*

He explained in verse eleven what he meant in verse ten. *"not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner;"* The key word is "brother." He was not speaking of the world here. He was speaking of a brother in the church. Those in the church could certainly be aware of those in the body who were fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, or extortioners. The instruction was, "with such an one no not to eat." Why eat? What eating has been referred to in this context? It is the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians may have had (we cannot prove it conclusively) "love feasts." These love feasts may (I emphasize "may") compare to our times of eating together as a church (fellowship dinners, pot luck dinners, etc.)

Some of the Corinthians had formerly been partakers of the very same kind of sins that Paul is now addressing as reason for not keeping company. They were washed from their former sins.

*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. -- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.*

While the list in 1 Corinthians 5:11, may not be all-inclusive, there may be good reason to consider it all-inclusive. Taking it as an all-inclusive list relieves the church of making subjective decisions. This is particularly true if we consider the various meanings of sexual perversions, which stem

from the Greek word "Porneo," the word translated here as fornicator and fornication. For example: The strict definition of fornication is sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons. (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In the case of this man at Corinth, he had committed incest, which is not included in the strict dictionary definition of fornication. The OED says that the scripture includes adultery in the definition of fornication. Adultery is not included in the list nor is rape, but we know both are hideous sins. Notice that both adultery and fornication are included in the list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind are also listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, which are terms for sodomy. For those crimes, which a person might commit, that are clearly against the laws of society like murder, arson, etc., the church would undoubtedly take action against the offender. In connection with that, here is an interesting excerpt from *Pendleton's Church Manual*.

**"General Offences.** It has been stated that a general offence, as distinguished from a personal one, is committed against a church in its collective capacity. That is to say, it is committed against no member in particular, but against all the members in general--against one member as much as another. To this definition it may be added that while all general offences are against churches as bodies, some are, and some are not, violations of the law of public morals. For example, drunkenness, theft, lying, etc., violate the law of morality, and may be considered offences against society at large as well as against the churches of Christ; but the espousal of false and heretical doctrines by a church-member, though an offence against the church, is not a crime against society. It does not invade the domain--of public morals." - - **Pendleton's Church Manual.**

*For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? -- 1 Corinthians 5:12*

What can we understand from Paul's first question? Without what? The church was meant. Without was outside the church. The second question makes that clear. The church was to judge them that were within. Within what? The church is meant - that is, those within the membership of the church. The church had no authority over those outside its membership.

*But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. -- 1 Cor. 5:13*

The obvious meaning here is that the church judged those who were within the body, but when they were put outside the body, then God judged them. For that reason, the church was instructed to put away from among themselves (outside the membership of the church) that wicked person. Does the church have the right to remove a person from the body? Indeed, the church is commanded to do so. This brings an interesting thought. Can a person who is washed from his sins be called a wicked person? Obviously, this man was. Was he a believer? Yes, he was. This leads us to our next passage in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

*But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. -- 2 Corinthians 2:5,6*

I placed these two verses together to show the person of whom this is spoken. It was the man in 1 Corinthians 5. Obviously, the church at Corinth was obedient to the instructions of Paul. This passage indicates they followed through with the "punishment." I believe Paul is comforting the

church here. Grief was only in part. Paul did not want to over charge everybody, and that is why he had written in the first place. Now he says that, this punishment, which was afflicted of many (Literally: of the majority) was sufficient. Many is translated from the Greek word "*Plehon (Plehon)*" which means more, many, greater, further, most, or more part. This list shows the various English words used in Scripture to translate the same Greek word. Clearly, it means majority. That brings an important thought to mind. In the exercise of church discipline, there may be those who do not understand completely or those who are not in total agreement with the issue. The matter must needs be settled by the majority. That is why this is included in God's word. While we strive for absolute unity in all things, it is not always possible to have it in every case.

Paul indicates that it is time to take another step with this individual.

*So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. -- 2 Corinthians 2:7*

The meaning of this verse here cannot be easily mistaken. The offending person is to be forgiven and comforted. Why? He has suffered sufficient punishment at the hands of the majority. He is a brother and one beloved. He was never to have been treated as an enemy as other passages of scripture will indicate. Second Thessalonians 3:15 is a good example. He must have repented else there would never have been a command to forgive him. Forgiveness is based on repentance. Certainly it is the teaching of scripture that when a person repents, he is to be forgiven - even to seventy times seven. Someone will say, "What if this person doesn't mean it and what if he does it again?" What if he does? The same course is open to the church as was open to them in the first place.



Here are some passages, which teach us to forgive and which give the basis for forgiveness:

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. -- Matthew 6:12-15*

*Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was*

*done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. -*  
- Matthew 18:21-35.

*Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. --* Luke 17:1-5.

Now we come to the next verse in the passage in which Paul admonished the church to forgive and restore the man.

*Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.*  
-- 2 Corinthians 2:8

Confirmation of love toward a wayward brother is essential. How does one confirm his love to another? A synonym for confirm is ratify. That can be done only by words of commitment and kindness. John Gill's thoughts on this verse are most helpful and are quoted here:

**“express your love to him in the most kind and tender manner, show the same, and as strong love to him as you did before, and as if he had never offended; receive him as a brother in the most affectionate manner, and embrace him with the most endearing expressions of respect and friendship; and let your reception of him in this kind and friendly way be with the full consent, and by the joint vote and suffrage of the whole church, for so the word translated ‘confirm’ signifies; for as the ejection of a person out of a church must be done by the decree and vote of the church, or it is not authentic, so the reception of a person into it must be in like manner; and since this was to be done by the suffrage of the church, the apostle beseeches and exhorts them to do it.” -- John Gill**

*For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. -- 2 Corinthians 2:9*

The explanation for this verse is to show that, as the church was obedient in the removal of the person from the body, now they were to confirm their love to him, forgiving him. As they obeyed before, even so now, so that the apostle would know that they had it in their mind to walk obediently.

*To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; -- 2 Corinthians 2:10*

This is a wonderful expression from the Apostle. If the church at Corinth forgave anything, then Paul forgave it as well. This certainly suggests the authority of a local church in kingdom affairs. When a church

executes the commands of the Lord, who are the outsiders who can object? or criticize? Why or on what basis is the forgiveness given? In the person of Christ - because He forgave us, then we are to forgive others.

*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. -- 2 Corinthians 2:11*

And what was the purpose for forgiveness? It was obedience to the command of Christ, but also to stop the efforts of the devil to bring division in the body. Satan would like resentment to breed. Aloofness and pride can creep in to those who have not yet sinned after the similitude of this person's transgression.

We could sum up the actions taken by the church at Corinth in the following statements:

1. A man took his own father's wife and thereby committed fornication or incest.
2. The fornication among the church at Corinth became a common report.
3. The church was puffed up over the incident and had done nothing to correct it.
4. Paul wrote and gave the church directions to put the wicked man out of the church and to have no company with him.
5. The church obeyed Paul's letter.
6. The man obviously repented. Paul wrote instructing them to forgive him and confirm their love to him.

This pattern can generally be followed in the church. A person sins, is disciplined, and is avoided in intimate contact. The offending individual repents, is forgiven, and the church shows their composite forgiveness by confirming their love to him. Confirmation on the part of the church should end the matter forever.

## **2 Thessalonians 3:6-15**

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. -- 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.*

In this passage, we have instructions to the church at Thessalonica concerning those who walk "disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us" (Paul and his companions)." This is no imperative for "witch hunting" for the church. When a person is disorderly, disruptively disobedient, or otherwise offensive to others, then action is required. If a

person is doing something that is offensive to another, then the offended should speak to him - if he will not hear him, take one or two others that every word may be established - if he will not hear them, then tell it to the church, and let the church rule on disorder. It is wrong to shun members of the body who have not been disciplined by the body at large. We are to build up one another; admonish one another, etc. The specific example concerns those who walk disorderly "working not at all, but are busybodies."

Nothing is specifically mentioned about action being taken when the church is gathered together as in 1 Corinthians 5. A person walking disorderly would, however, be noted in the manner which we have already demonstrated. This is the passage, which completes the instructions from Matthew 18. Unresolved offenders could not be permitted to remain in the body without further complicating the problems and fostering schisms and division in the church. The leaven would continue to affect the entire body. Division is not an objective of the Lord's Church. Rather, we are to strive *"for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

Good counsel concerning the disorderly walk and immoral conduct come from *Cobb's Church Manual*, which is quoted here:

**"A member of a church might be guilty of some act that could not be classed strictly as immoral, but it might be very disorderly. For instance, a member may, because of carelessness or indifference, habitually absent himself from the regular and stated services of the church. That is disorderly. When members are guilty of such, the church should look into the matter. If necessary, they should deal with the offenders. Churches have been known to make a rule that if a member absented himself for three times in succession without good and sufficient reasons the church would take action against him. A church has no authority to pass such rules, for a**

**church is not a law-making body; but the Scriptures teach that church members should not forsake the assembling of themselves together, and a church does have the right to class disorderly such as willingly and purposely absent themselves from her services and to deal with them accordingly. There are many other things which constitute disorderliness, but that is given merely as an example." -- *Cobb's Church Manual.***

To "*have no company with him, that he may be ashamed,*" does not rule out all contact with the individual, for the church is further instructed to "*admonish him as a brother.*"

All the sections of scripture studied thus far teach a strong change in the normal company keeping of the offending individual. "*As an heathen man and a publican;*" "*Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned;*" "*with such an one, no not to eat;*" and "*have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.*"

## **The Attitude of a Church Toward Those Who Have Been Excluded**

What should be the attitude of a church toward those who have been excluded from her membership? That is an important question, for the attitude, which a church takes toward such may largely determine the effectiveness of the discipline. A church should have a noble object in view in withdrawing from disorderly members. Such an attitude, if assumed by all the members, will help toward the attainment of that object.

Jesus said with reference to the personal offense of the one who would not hear the church, "*Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a*

*publican.*" This means that one would not have close and intimate fellowship with such a man.

An excluded member, regardless of the crime committed, should not be treated in such a manner as to lead him to think that the church has no interest in his spiritual condition. Such an attitude might provoke one to despair. He might be caused to "throw himself away."

### **Titus 3:10,11**

*"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself," Titus 3:10,11.*

We need to take note of the fact that this letter is written to Titus - who was obviously an overseer (bishop). The pattern, then, would demonstrate that bishops are to care for the flock and take the oversight. They are to guard against error. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth - and they follow, as he follows the Lord, their appointed bishop or pastor.

*"O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee." -- 1 Timothy 6:20,21.*

The passage from Titus 3, quoted above, is the only place in the New Testament where the word "heretic" appears. *Robertson's Word Pictures*



appears to shed some light on the word. Robertson says the Greek word is an old adjective which means "to choose, a choosing of a party as in Acts 5:17 or of teaching as in 2 Peter 2:1.

*"Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation," -- Acts 5:17.*

*"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." -- 2 Peter 2:1*

The passage we are now considering from Titus is a companion to Romans 16:17,18. Both may go together to make a complete statement on the matter to the church.

*"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." -- Romans 16:17,18.*

What does it mean to say they "*by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple?*" The ones who cause divisions are people who know how to say their words so that, they deceive the gullible ones. The word simple in Scripture means those who are harmless, without guile or fraud, harmless, free from guilt, who fear no evil from others; who

distrust no one. These are the ones sought out by the sectarians or schismatics.

What is heresy? The following sections on heresy and motive for Church Discipline have been edited from *Cobb's Church Manual*.

**“Heresy is the imbibing of doctrines contrary to what has been taught. The Scriptures warn of heretics. They are often Satan’s tools to draw men away from the truths of the Word of God, or the doctrines of Christ. A person might be in error concerning some doctrine and yet not be a heretic in the true sense of the word. After the proper admonition many may give up their false views and teachings; but if one is persistent in teaching heresy, he should be, as the apostle admonished, rejected or excluded. If a church allows a heretic to retain membership and at the same time to teach his heretical doctrines, a divided church will more than likely be the result. Some will follow his teaching; factions will arise in the church and bring in hurtful divisions. The Apostle Paul admonished the church at Rome to avoid those who caused divisions (Romans 16:17). It is always good to adhere to that admonition.” – *Cobb’s Church Manual*.**

## **The Motive for Church Discipline**

What is the true motive for church discipline? Is it to get revenge? That should not be the motive. It is not the Scriptural motive! It may sometimes be a false motive among some, but it is never the scriptural view.

A church should have certain well-defined motives in view in the disciplining of a member. The one disciplined should understand those

motives. He should not be withdrawn from and left thinking that some who did not appreciate him were getting revenge. There are at least three pure and holy objects to be attained in church discipline:

## **1. THE GLORY OF GOD**

The motive prompting all that a church does should be to honor and to glorify God. Paul said, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*" -- Ephesians 3:21. When a church exercises discipline upon her members, it should be done to and for the glory of God the same as any other act of the church. A church cannot glorify God without exercising discipline. The ungodly and disorderly in her membership will prevent it. Members who engage in ungodly and disorderly conduct certainly do not glorify God. A church can glorify God only as He is glorified in the lives of her members. If there be those members in a church who persist in disorderly living, the church glorifies Him in withdrawing from them.

## **2. THE CHASTITY OF THE CHURCHES**

Churches are admonished in the Scriptures to keep themselves as chaste virgins. That means that they are to keep themselves pure from sin and worldliness. The church's mingling in worldly affairs is called fornication in the Scriptures. A church may be guilty of spiritual fornication just as a person may be guilty of fleshly fornication.

The church is admonished to be separate from the world. The world is the enemy of the church; therefore, the church cannot compromise with the world and be true to God nor be pure or chaste. God requires faithfulness of

the churches of Christ. Christ's exhortation to the church at Smyrna was, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*"

*"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever,"* I John 2:15-17. If a church loves the world, it is evident that she does not love God, for love for God and for the world do not dwell at the same time in the same heart.

Jesus said in His intercessory prayer, "*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world,*" -- John 17:16. The churches are not worldly institutions. They are not institutions of the world; therefore, they should separate from the world. Some have argued that Scripture is not applicable to a church; but if the New Testament Scriptures are not applicable to a church, let the objectors point out to what they are applicable.

One should read Paul's appeal to the Corinthian church for a separate life (II Corinthians 6:11-18).

### **3. THE SPIRITUAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLINED**

When a church exercises her right in disciplining a member, it should be done for the spiritual good and improvement of that member. In the case of the personal offense, Christ pointed out that the "gaining of the offender" is to be regarded as the motive (Matthew 18:15-19). If one is overtaken in a

fault, the spiritual ones are to restore him in the spirit of meekness, but not without a proper attitude and disposition upon his part. If the offender is truly penitent, he should be restored.

Withdrawal of fellowship should be resorted to when the church has taken the scriptural steps and those steps have failed. Then exclusion should be done in a spirit of solemnity, and never in a spirit of ill feeling or anger; for such would destroy the very purpose of the withdrawal. The church turns the offender over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (day of judgment).

There should be no manifestation of bitterness, persecution, oppression, nor a desire for revenge. Discipline should be done in meekness and fear, with a full realization that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged for the deeds done in the body. **When a church withdraws from a member, it does not mean that the individual is not a saved person.** It means that the conduct of the excluded member has not been in accord with the cited standards of scripture. Withdrawal is for the purpose of enforcing that thought upon the mind and heart of the excluded that he may soon repent and return to the fellowship of the church.

## **Removal from Church Membership**

On the heels of the study of Church Discipline, is another study that is closely connected to it. That is, "How does the church dismiss members?"

Members are dismissed by:

## 1. Death.

## 2. Exclusion or erasure.

**"Sometimes churches drop from their rolls those members who move and do not get letters, especially if they never communicate in any way with the church. No formal charge of misconduct is usually brought against them; they are merely dropped. That is sometimes called "erasure," but it is equal to exclusion since they are, by action of the church, dismissed from her membership." -- Cobb's Church Manual.**

## 3. Letter.

*"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." -- 2 Corinthians 3:1-3.*

This passage along with Romans 16:1 (*I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:*) is generally used as a basis for church letters. At best, church letters are a tradition spawned out of a perceived necessity. As the church began to spread, people moved from the area where they were members of the church. It is very likely they did not know whether or not another church existed in the area of their new residence. Churches are known to have granted letters, which they gave to the parties involved so that, if they encountered another

church, they could present the letter for membership. So, the letter of recommendation was simply that – a letter of commendation. Letters of commendation to other churches should be candid and truthful.

## **Bearing the infirmities and faults of others**

A good preventive for church discipline is the bearing of the infirmities and faults of others. This does not in any way detract from the scriptures, which command discipline. We all know there are people in the church who are "weak in the faith" at times. We need to teach and encourage these with patience and kindness. Arguments usually do not provide the desired result - neither do doubtful disputations. Christian growth is a reality. Just as we grow physically, we also grow spiritually. Growth comes through the word of God on the spiritual side.

*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. -- Romans 14:1.*

*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. -- Romans 15:1-3*

*To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. -- 1 Corinthians 9:22.*

*Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: -- 1 Corinthians 12:21-24.*

*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. -- 1 Thessalonians 5:14.*

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