

Withdrawing From Disorderly Christians

Numerous New Testament scriptures instruct Christians to withdraw themselves from unfaithful Christians (see Appendix, References). Only one such passage should make the instruction binding upon us, but the volume of scriptural content draws us even more by a sense of duty to deeper investigation. Herein the subject is explored. This subject has its fair share of debate and controversy, but this work is engaged with every effort to an unbiased and scripturally pure approach. We begin by defining scriptural terms.

I. The Action Of Withdrawing

A. Individual Action

About a dozen different words in the original New Testament language are used in explaining the action commanded of Christians to withdraw from disorderly Christians (see Appendix, Definitions). These words reveal that withdrawing is very personal; it is something that one does to another, individually.

1. Things involved in withdrawal

The scriptures which enjoin this action all describe a separation and avoidance of the social company of another. The usual instruction is positively stated, such as, "Withdraw yourselves." However, the instruction in some instances is negatively stated, such as, "Do not keep company." In these instances, the words indicate the familiarity, closeness, and participation with others, which is to be avoided in withdrawing.

The earliest occurrences of withdrawing in scripture appear in the Old Testament where God instructs the people of Israel to avoid and not keep social company with people of the heathen nations around them. They are especially instructed not to marry them, lest they be led into idolatry. Long after the fall of the Divided Kingdoms, this idea persisted into New Testament times. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, she was amazed that Jesus, a Jew, had anything to do with her (John 4:9). His disciples were surprised as well (vs 27). Moreover, Peter went to the home of the Gentile, Cornelius, only after a convincing vision (Acts 10:28), knowing that Moses' law forbade such social contact (see Appendix, Definitions):

Acts 10:28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with [KOLLAO] or go to one of another nation...."

Jesus utilizes this concept of social shunning to describe how Christians should treat other Christians who continually rebel against God's law. In Matthew 18:15 He says, "Let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." They knew what was inferred by that. When Peter returned to his brethren after visiting Cornelius, they protested saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" Jews obviously did not take social meals together with Gentiles. Though this Mosaic law was taken away, Peter later fell back into the old practice of avoiding the Gentiles in hypocrisy, evidenced in part by him not eating with them:

Gal 2:12 For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew [HUPOSTELLO] and separated [APHORIZO] himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

Though Peter's actions were wrong, these words (see Appendix, Definitions) accurately describe how Jews shunned the heathen and therefore also describe how Jesus instructs us to shun a persistently sinning Christian. Taking a casual meal together is a warm and intimate experience and one of the most natural manifestations of social togetherness, which is no doubt why it is specifically mentioned as an activity not to be engaged when withdrawing is required (1 Cor 5:11).

It is not only socially eating together that is to be avoided in withdrawing. Any other contact for the purposes of social engagement is also to be avoided in withdrawing. The words employed convey the idea of not "mixing it up" with another, that is, refusing their social company and abstaining from familiarity. This includes withdrawing such social intimacy which previously existed before their faith was lost.

However, some have suggested that this withdrawing is limited only to the removal of a thing, so if no previous association existed, they claim we have no association to remove and hence cannot "withdraw" anything. Therefore, if we are newly introduced to someone and learn he is an unfaithful Christian, the supposition is that we have no obligation to disassociate from him. This claim is not valid, for one, because scripture clearly also instructs us to avoid such a person, which is applicable whether or not we had any prior closeness with him. Moreover, the verb "withdraw" is intransitive, which indicates not that we are withdrawing some object of our action but that we, ourselves, are withdrawing.

Observe how the words of withdrawal are used in other matters for additional insight to the meaning of the instruction. The word for "avoid" in Romans 16:17 is also used in 1 Peter 3:11 to state that those who would inherit a blessing and love life "turn away" from doing evil. Also, the word for "withdraw" in 2 Thess 3:6 is used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:20 to describe his efforts to "avoid" blame or false accusations that could arise over his motives or alleged mishandling of relief funds. Moreover, the word for "reject" in Titus 3:10 is the same word used admonishing us to "refuse" old wives' fables and foolish questions (1 Tim 4:7; 2 Tim 2:23). The same way we are to avoid any evil deeds or even avoid the suspicion of such is how we are to shun unfaithful Christians.

2. Things not involved in withdrawal

To shun close social association does not suggest that we should ever be unkind or rude to someone. Note that in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15 where Paul instructs us not to keep company with one disorderly, he continues saying, "Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." In order to admonish him, some social contact is necessary. We ought not smugly look away or refuse a friendly greeting. Some have refused even to shake hands with another, thinking it would suggest "the right hands of fellowship," as in Galatians 2:9. Paul might here be referring to a "laying on of hands," which was clearly a gesture of approval or appointment in those days (Acts 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14), but this is quite different from our handshake today. The common, courteous greeting of middle-eastern culture in those days would have been by a kiss; the handshake was unknown to them (Mat 26:48; Lk 7:45; Rom 16:16). Besides, neither a kiss nor a handshake necessarily means we approve of their behavior; it can simply mean we care about them.

2 Tim 2:24-26 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

To shun close social association with an erring brother does not mean we should make him feel unwelcomed to attend a worship assembly. This is the best place for him to receive an admonition. Our study will bear out that admonishing is integrally and inseparably connected to withdrawing. However, asking him to lead one of the worship forms would certainly convey fellowship status, and such fellowship ought not be offered, as we will see by further study. Also, a meeting together to discuss his spiritual condition should never be denied, should he be so receptive. We "shake the dust off our feet" only if he would refuse to receive us (Matt 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5). Besides, these examples are not merely casual social encounters but gatherings for spiritual purposes.

To shun close social association with an erring Christian does not suggest that we should ever deny him our assistance if he has a real need in life nor refuse to offer our consolation in a tragedy. Our study will show that the association we are to withdraw is that casual togetherness that suggests fellowship, not those associations which are necessary and essential in life. There is an obvious difference between going to the funeral of an erring Christian's family member and going to his birthday party. There is an obvious difference between bringing him necessary food if his house burns down and going on a picnic with him.

1 John 3:17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

B. Corporate Action

Scripture indicates another sense in which withdrawal is to occur: the removal of one from among a group. This is action performed by the church as a body (1 Cor 5:4). Local congregations are comprised of individual Christians who recognize one another as belonging among them. Scripture makes a clear distinction between those who are included within a local church's number and those who are not (Rom

16:1, 5; 1 Cor 14:23, 24; Col 4:16; 1 Tim 5:16). One's mere regular attendance at worship assemblies does not automatically make him a part of that local body.

1. Being "among"

The preposition "among" helps make this distinction in scripture. Paul writes, "It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality **among** you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named **among** the Gentiles..." (1 Cor 5:1). The original word for "among" is EN. A diagram of prepositions would show a circle with things inside the circle as being "EN;" things outside the circle are not "EN." To come out from among is expressed by the word "EK" and is diagramed by an arrow line starting from within the circle and proceeding out, thus coming from "EN" or no longer being "EN."

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament defines EN as "a primary preposition denoting (fixed) position (in place, time or state), and (by implication) instrumentality (medially or constructively), i.e. a relation of rest (intermediate between [EIS, coming into] and [EK, going out from])." Note that "among" is relative to time, place, or state; the context will make the distinction. For an example with respect to time, Acts 18:11 states, "And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God **among** them." For an example with respect to place, Mark 5:3 states, "...Who had *his* dwelling **among** the tombs..." For an example with respect to state, Luke 22:3 states, "Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered **among** the twelve." The Scriptures contain many examples where the word "among" (EN) refers to those of a certain status, type, class, or group: "among women" (Lk 1:32), "among the Jews" (Jn 10:19), "among men" (Act 4:12), "among the soldiers" (Act 12:18), "among the apostles" (Rom 16:7), "among our members" (Jam 3:6).

It is important to understand what Paul means by "among you" in reference to the fornicator in 1 Corinthians 5 (see Appendix, Definitions):

*1 Cor 5:2-7 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be **taken away** [EXAIRO] **from among** [EN] you. 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. 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, 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. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out [EKKATHAIRO] the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

*1 Cor 5:12, 13 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "**put away** [EXAIRO] **from yourselves** the evil person."*

Some have argued that the fornicator was among them by mere reason of his presence at worship assemblies. This does not follow sound reasoning, because Paul instructs them to "put away from yourselves the evil person" (1 Cor 5: 2, 13). If the fornicator is among them by mere reason of his presence in their place of worship, then to put him away from among themselves should mean they not allow his presence in their place of worship. Perhaps they would stand guard at the door, call the police, or post a sign stating "erring Christians not welcome." However, a worship assembly is exactly the best place for an ungodly Christian to hear an admonition. This argument does not hold up.

A typical scenario today involves a person who wants to abandon his godly lifestyle and announces to the church, "Please consider me no longer a member of the church," and he stops attending worship services. The argument claims that if a member "quits the church" and is no longer present among them in worship assemblies, the church as a body and as individuals have no responsibility to put away and withdraw. The argument therefore concludes that withdrawing is only required when ungodly Christians continue to be among them in their place of assembling for worship. This idea completely misses what it truly means to be "among." We will examine this further in the applications that follow later.

2. Marking for identification

Rather than with reference to place, the instruction to withdraw as a body is reasonable with reference to state. This is consistent with the instruction to mark or make note of those who are disorderly (Rom

16:17; 2 Thess 3:14). Two different original words are used for "note" in these verses. One word is SKOPEO {skop-eh'-o}, which J. H. Thayer (JHT) defines as, "1) to look at, observe, contemplate 2) to mark 3) to fix one's eyes upon, direct one's attention to, any one 4) to look to, take heed to thyself." This translates to the English vernacular "watch out for" or "look out for," as Luke 11:35 would read. This word is also used with reference to taking note of the faithful:

*Phil 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and **note** those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

The other word is SEMEIOO {say-mi-o'-o}: "1) to mark, to note, distinguish by marking 2) to mark or note for one's self" (JHT). Thus, those who have become disorderly are publicly identified as such and are indicated as no longer belonging to that local body. A distinction is made regarding who, by reason of faithfulness, belongs in their number and who does not. For example, the Jerusalem church did not at first recognize Saul as a faithful Christian, so he was not permitted to join their number until evidence of his faith was known among them (Acts 9:26, 27). So it is in 1 Corinthians 5 that Paul essentially orders the church to identify this one from whom they are to withdraw and declare him unbefitting to be part of their group but a part of Satan's domain instead. More will be stated later about marking when we consider the purpose of withdrawing.

3. Fellowship

As previously suggested, the aspect of fellowship is involved here. In fact, this is sometimes accommodatively described as "withdrawing fellowship." Though this exact phrase is not found in scripture, the Bible student understands the use of accommodative language to convey scriptural concepts. For examples, the word "sermon" and the phrase "gospel meeting" are nowhere found in scripture, but they are valid terms to describe authorized functions. To validate, the words for fellowship or fellowshiping (METOCHE, KOINONIA, SUGKOINONEO) indicate jointly sharing, partaking together, and having in common. When any two Christians are both walking in the light of God's word, they fellowship one another, mutually supporting and commending each other, regardless of their local body affiliation.

*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have **fellowship** with us; and truly our **fellowship** is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have **fellowship** with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have **fellowship** with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 Jn 1:3-7)*

If one of them begins walking in darkness, the faithful follower can no longer offer partnership; the fellowship must be withdrawn, as here expressed in the present tense, active voice, and imperative mood:

*And **have no fellowship with** the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. (Eph 5:11)*

II. Applications

As this comes together, three distinct but related actions are evident:

- Personally withdrawing and avoiding casual social togetherness (1 Cor 5:11);
- Marking to identify the one to be rebuked, from whom we are to withdraw (2 Thess 3:14);
- Removing one from among a group (1 Cor 5:13).

A. Misconceptions

If our language is not clear, we can confuse these concepts. Sometimes when people say "withdraw" they might mean social avoidance and they might mean removal from a group. Similarly, when people sometimes say "disfellowship" they might mean removal from a group and they might mean marking as

disorderly. When discussing, we must be careful to use correct terminology. Here are some examples of unclear or misapplied statements that lead to false doctrines.

1. "If he withdraws from you, you cannot withdraw from him."

It is self-evident that you cannot avoid someone who avoids you. If he is not near you personally, it is impossible for you to turn away from him. However, the actual claim of those making this statement is that if someone removes himself from among a congregation's number (the intent of "withdraws"), there is no more authority for the church as a body to mark him or the members to avoid social contact (the intent of "withdraw") if he becomes disorderly. This is referring to two different things using the same word. The meaning is essentially manipulated to serve the doctrine.

Follow this logic with an example of two members in the same congregation. The first man becomes an adulterer and refuses to repent. The church eventually marks him as disorderly, removes him from among their number, and they individually avoid social contact as scripture requires. The second man is smarter; he knows how to work the system. He first removes himself from among their number, though he might even continue to attend their worship services as a visitor. When he likewise becomes an unrepentant adulterer, according to the doctrine, the church has no authority to take any action whatsoever. This is absurd. It is unreasonable that the two men who are in exactly the same situation would not be treated exactly the same way. The only support for this is through word wrangling.

2. "If he disfellowships you, you cannot disfellowship him."

This is similar. By definition, fellowship is at least a two way proposition. There can be no mutual sharing if one party refuses to share. However, those making this statement are actually claiming that a church cannot disfellowship one who has removed himself from among them (the intent of "disfellowships"). This indicates a gross misunderstanding of the concept of fellowship. Scripture makes clear that all faithful Christians have fellowship with all other faithful Christians whether or not they are part of the same local body. When a person simply removes himself from one local church to join another, fellowship is not lost between them, unless some unfaithfulness on one part or the other is noted. If a Christian is going to disfellowship a church, it is imperative that he hold some sin against them. It is intrinsically impossible to arbitrarily disclaim fellowship with no indication of sin between either party. Conclusively, there is most certainly not only authority but also responsibility for a church to mark and for individual members to socially withdraw from one disorderly who has simply removed himself from among their number.

3. "We have authority only to withdraw from those among our own congregation."

This is perhaps the most contorted statement of all and indicates a profound misunderstanding of terms. Again, it is self-evident that you can only put away from among yourselves one who is actually among you. However, this statement blurs the distinction between personal social avoidance and the removal of one from among a group. Look again at 1 Corinthians 5. In verse 2, the apostle says the sinner should be removed from among them. We have already carefully examined what this means. Then, in verse 11, he tells them to withdraw social company with such a person. Now if they put him out from among them, there is no way they can also actually socially withdraw as instructed, if they are only to withdraw from those among them. This is illogical and a mishandling of scripture.

Some preachers further argue that, since elders have supervision only among members of their own local congregation, so also you can only withdraw from members among your own local congregation. However, our study will eventually show that it is not the elders' function to rule on who is to be marked as disorderly. There is no implication that withdrawing is therefore connectively limited to those within the local body. This conclusion is arbitrarily derived. Let's investigate this further.

B. The Scope Of Fellowship

1. Brotherhood acceptance, rejection

Scripture does not support the idea that withdrawing has a local body limitation. Examine Romans 16, where Paul identifies by name many faithful Christians in various other local churches. He mentions how their reputation has spread throughout the brotherhood, and he instructs them to fellowship them all with

no restrictions imposed by congregational affiliation. Notwithstanding, congregational autonomy is in no way compromised in the process.

In the midst of all this, verses 17 and 18 describe an avoiding or turning away from dissentious Christians (reference 1 Cor 5:9-12). If Paul's instructions have no local body limitation in regards to accepting those who are faithful, then his instructions to avoid those who have become unfaithful ought also have no local body limitation. Any such limitation must be indicated by a direct statement, approved example, or necessary inference. No verse suggests such a specific limitation. We cannot take a general statement in scripture and assume that specific limitations apply to it. That is a misunderstanding of the distinction between specific and generic authority. If a precept has specific limitations, it will be somehow indicated within scripture. To the extent that an instruction has no specific application limits, it has generic application.

Consequently, if withdrawing presumably has only a local body scope of application, then when a church marks and withdraws from an unrepentant, disorderly Christian, he can simply join himself to another local church, enjoying their association, and never again be admonished for his sin. No love is demonstrated in this. If this brother never tells this other church what happened, they will never know his true spiritual condition, unless someone else who knows advises them. Without such knowledge, the church will be fellowshipping a disorderly Christian and failing to admonish him as they should. There is a fundamental breakdown in brotherhood fellowship if a Christian is received at one church but rejected at another. Such breakdown demands a resolution. Nevertheless, preachers who believe this local-only withdrawal doctrine further claim that there is no authority for brethren in one place to write a letter to brethren in another place warning them about an unrepentant, disorderly Christian who would seek to join them. Moreover, these preachers simply throw such letters in the trash when received. Let's look to the scriptures about this.

2. Scriptural examples

The epistles contain examples where people are marked by name both for faithfulness (Phil 2:25, 29) and unfaithfulness (1 Tim 1:20). Marking the faithful has the effect of commending a brother to a brother and giving him full welcome at other congregations (Col 4:10). Marking the unfaithful identifies those from whom we are to withdraw (2 Tim 3:5). One may argue that these markings are coming from an inspired apostle with the spiritual gift of discernment, notwithstanding, these are our approved examples to follow, and we can know men by their fruits.

A specific example of marking the faithful is shown in Acts 18:27. When Apollos, in Ephesus, decides to go to Corinth to teach them, the Ephesian church writes a letter to the Corinthian church, which would identify him as faithful Christian to be fellowshipped. This is by no means Ephesus meddling with Corinth's affairs nor is it Corinth submitting to the rule of the Ephesian elders. If one church could write another to commend to them a faithful brother, it stands to reason that they could write another to warn them about an unfaithful brother.

Examples of this very thing involve Philetus (2 Tim 2:17), Hymenaeus, Alexander (1 Tim 1:20), Phygellus, and Hermogenes (2 Tim 1:15). Concerning Hymenaeus and Alexander, Paul declares that he had delivered them to Satan, indicating the same kind of action as was executed in Corinth (1 Cor 5:5). This is not Paul gossiping; this is Paul revealing the true facts without malice. As Paul's epistles were considered scripture (Peter 3:16), these letters would have been shared among all, and all would know by these letters that these men who have strayed from the truth ought to be shunned by individual Christians and are not to be fellowshipped by any church they might seek to join. Paul would not be expecting that brethren would throw his letters in the trash because of this content.

Conclusively, brethren following Paul's instructions and examples today most certainly have authority to write letters in truth and love to warn others about those practicing deceit by name within the brotherhood. Brethren receiving such letters should neither turn a deaf ear to such warnings nor blindly accept such words without inquiring for themselves. Instead, we ought to "prove all things" (1 Thess 5:21). More about this will come later when wrongful markings are discussed.

3. Corporate duty; individual duty

One of the false statements heard during the division over institutionalism around the middle of the last century was "whatever a Christian individual can do, the church as a corporate body can do and vise

versa." Though a deep discussion on this is beyond the scope of this study, it should here suffice to simply state that scripture makes a clear distinction between corporate action and individual action (1 Tim 5:16). The same fallacy is again similarly at play in this. Socially eating meals together is not a corporate church function. Withdrawing social contact from disorderly Christians is a personal, individual task and therefore has no corporate or congregational limits of responsibility or applicability. To assume such limitations in scope where none are revealed is to loose where God has not loosed.

Incidentally, if one church fails to mark and withdraw from a disorderly Christian who leaves their number, some claim that other Christians with whom he would later associate have no responsibility to mark and withdraw if they come to know of his disorderliness. This, too, is unreasonable; this person is rewarded to a degree for the failure of the body to comply with God's Law. Compounded sin should never give one an advantage.

The simple divine instruction is to mark and socially withdraw from Christians whom we know are confirmed to be disorderly. Individuals do not have to depend on corporate marking by a church to personally withdraw from a Christian they know to be unfaithful, and neither must they depend on corporate fellowship of a church to personally refuse to withdraw from a Christian they know to be faithful.

III. The Restoration Process

A. Discipline

When scripture is examined in totality, withdrawing from disorderly Christians is actually the last resort effort prescribed in a restoration process, which is itself part of a larger disciplinary process. Discipline refers to training in all modes. It includes not only punishment but also progressive teaching, instruction, nurturing, encouragement, warning, and rebuke. The New Testament word for discipline is PAIDEIA {pahee-di'-ah}, defined as "1) the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment). It also includes the training and care of the body 2) whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions. 2a) Instruction which aims at increasing virtue 2b) chastisement, chastening, (of the evils with which God visits men for their amendment)" (JHT). This word appears in the following passages (in bold).

*2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for **instruction** in righteousness,*

*Hebrews 12:11 Now no **chastening** seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

B. The Process Of Admonishing

When a Christian wanders into sin, withdrawing is not the first action to be taken, but rather, we are commanded to admonish him with a stern but gentle rebuke. The original word for admonish, NOUTHESIA, literally means a "putting in mind," hence "training by the word" (W. E. Vine), especially, to warn one against things that are wrong for his instruction or the correction of his behavior. A synonym of "exhorting" (JHT), admonishing is more than just telling someone he needs to repent; it is teaching him, explaining why his actions are sinful.

Titus 1:13 ...Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

James 5:19, 20 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

God's word makes clear that one who sees a brother sinning is to first simply go and talk to him about it. He is not to immediately tell it to others or take it to the elders. Withdrawing would occur only after repeated admonitions have failed to restore him. In fact, Jesus outlines a clear stepwise approach in Matthew 18:15-17 (see Appendix, References):

1. If you see your brother in sin, speak to him privately alone;

2. If he doesn't listen to you, take others with you, who will establish the matter and admonish him further;
3. If he doesn't listen to the others, tell it to the church, who will further admonish him;
4. If he doesn't listen to the church, personally withdraw social involvement.

This is unmistakably a procedure and so clear a process that a flowchart is easily diagrammed to illustrate it (see Appendix, Withdrawal Flowchart). We start at step one, and only after step one fails to bring repentance do we go to step two, and so must we continue on down the line until the final step. We do not withdraw until he rejects the church's admonitions; we do not tell the church to admonish him until the specific matter has been established among witnesses; we do not bring witnesses until we have spoken to him privately alone. If we inform the church that a brother is possibly in sin, not first establishing the facts, it is nothing short of slander (Eph 4:31).

We need to apply diligence to harmonize the scriptures involving this (see Appendix, References). Specifically, certain passages instruct us to withdraw but state nothing about these progressive steps of admonition (e. g., Rom 16:17). We understand that the withdrawing demanded by these scriptures would occur only after the prescribed steps are taken to admonish. Similarly, certain passages instruct us to admonish but state nothing about withdrawing (e. g., Tit 1:13). Also, Matthew 18 prescribes three warnings before withdrawing, but Titus 3:9-11 indicates only two. The answer to this apparent contradiction resides in recognizing that the commission of sin in Matthew 18 is not known within the church. If the sinner repents at the first private warning, the brother is saved, and no further action is necessary, but if unrepentance persists after a second warning, the matter is finally made known to the church, so the entire body can deliver a third warning. However, Titus 3 involves a sinner already known among the church to be contentious and divisive, and his twisted ways are self-evident. The additional step to make the matter known among them is pragmatically unnecessary. Nevertheless, the meaning of the word translated "reject" includes, "to avert by entreaty" (see Appendix, Definitions), which suggests that we should even so still be willing to continue in compassion to plead with him to repent if he is receptive to reason.

We understand that the discipline demanded by these scriptures must eventually lead to withdrawing if all else fails. We must not fail to admonish, and we must not fail to withdraw if the admonishing fails. These are commands, not options; we simply do not have the divine right to partially comply.

C. Process Omissions

Some Christians and churches today short-cut this process in various ways as pleases them, shown in these examples:

- Some people think that if corporate withdrawal is executed, individual withdrawal is not necessary. The idea is that as long as the sinner has been duly notified by the church corporately about his actions, individual Christians can socialize anyway. This simply omits part of Jesus' instructions, and such omission is sin.
- Some people think they can withdraw individually, but not corporately. They will talk to the sinner and even take others with them after the sinner refuses to listen. However, unwilling to call upon the whole church to admonish him, they will simply withdraw privately. We have no right to do this.
- Some people think that if they have personally informed the sinner of his error and perhaps later taken others also to admonish him, they have fulfilled their duty to him. They claim that this clears them of all other responsibility to withdraw, as this is now conscientiously between the sinner and his God. This is simply neglecting the commandment of the Lord, which is itself sin.
- Some people think that if a preacher teaches publicly on the general subject of the sin of the one disorderly, the requirement to admonish the brother has been met. This obviously does not fit the divine pattern. Jesus makes clear that the admonishing is to be in person and private, first between just two and then with witnesses. The specifics of the matter are to be established, which

can only happen with direct dialog. In case the accusation is false, the brother is given the opportunity to defend or explain his actions.

- Some people do absolutely nothing: neither admonishing an erring brother nor withdrawing from him. They claim that God knows their heart, that they are not condoning the error. This is preposterous, especially when they state that their silence is an act of love and forbearance for the sake of peace and unity.
- Some think golf or other such activities will present an opportunity to talk to him about his condition. They feel they have fulfilled the Lord's command if they maintain the social functionality, as long as at some time during their encounters they mention his need to repent. Even if these admonitions without withdrawal lead him to repentance, this is still wrong; it is the reasoning of the end justifying the means. We are in no position to suggest to God that we know a better way. The Lord commands us to both withdraw and admonish, and we ought to just obey in faith. We cannot fail to withdraw as long as we admonish any more than we can fail to admonish as long as we withdraw. If we have not held back in some way some social aspect of our relationship with him that would cause him shame, we have not fulfilled the Lord's command (2 Thess 3:14, 15). More discussion follows later regarding these matters.

Confusion may arise over Paul's open rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2. Why didn't Paul take Peter aside privately as Jesus instructed in Matthew 18 and the way Aquila and Priscilla did Apollos in Acts 18:26? Let's review the context.

Gal 2:11-14 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?..."

The reason is *not* because Paul is an apostle. His apostleship will not give him any special permission to violate the pattern Jesus gives. Also, the reason is *not* because Paul knows that Peter knows better and wants to make him a spectacle. Jesus reveals no exception to the pattern if we know they know better. The reason is because not just Peter but the rest of the Jews also are following this sin, and they all together need the rebuke.

D. The Involvement Of The Elders

1. Elders' role: executing the divine ordinance

God has not appointed the elders to decide who will be marked as disorderly and who will not. Instead, the Holy Spirit makes this determination through His divine revelation in the scriptures, stipulating that Christians with established evidence of disorderliness and unrepentance despite repeated warnings are to be marked and avoided. This is to be done by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 5:4), not upon opinion, possibility, suspicion, or personal sentiment. As overseers, not dictators, the elders' role is simply to insure that the Holy Spirit's will is executed without bias. If a brother needs to be marked, they have no choice but to see that such action is carried out within the church.

Notably, at no point in Matthew 18 does Jesus instruct us to tell the elders about a Christian persisting in sin. He says, "Tell it to the church." However, telling the elders may be an expedient way of eventually getting it told to the church, as the elders are responsible for those things which need to be publicly stated. Telling it to the church otherwise insures that the elders inevitably weigh in on the matter, if they have not yet been involved up to this point. For expediency, the whole church could come together to study the scriptures involved, with the elders confirming that all doctrine is sound.

2. Elders over-stepping their role

Far too often, a scenario in the church today is for a member to talk to the elders about a disorderly brother instead of talking directly to the brother. The very first step of the Lord's instructions is

completely disregarded. This is nothing more than gossip, and it is sin. Faithful elders will rebuke the tale-teller and exhort him to first talk directly to the disorderly brother. Unfaithful elders will act upon the words of the tale-bearer.

In another scenario, a member will take a disorderly brother to the elders so that they might admonish him. This may well be a fulfillment of the second step (taking witnesses along), but the elders are not the church. Unfortunately, some elders evidently think it is not necessary for the church as a body to deliver an admonition before withdrawing. In this case, the elders then apparently presume themselves to representatively embody the church (a concept foreign to scripture), and if the disorderly one does not repent after their private admonition, they simply deliver their ruling to the congregation, marking him as a heretic and expecting the church to withdraw without full knowledge of the matter. The step ordained by Jesus where the matter is explained to the congregation so they might admonish the one disorderly is conveniently omitted. In such a case, one could only say, "I don't know what you did, but I implore you to repent." Such an admonition would be not only mockery but sinful. Elders are not exempt from the divine pattern in Matthew 18. Withdrawing is to be done only after the sinner has demonstrated a refusal to listen to the church as a body, which means the church as a body must first be called to deliver an admonition.

In a variation of this unlawful scenario, some elders will send a personal letter to an individual being marked for disorderliness, but when they inform the church of their actions, the individual is not mentioned by name before the congregation. This might be to spare embarrassment for some in the congregation in cases where the individual is their family member. Some elders would even inform other local congregations about the individual by name while not even doing so among their own. By all means, any such favoritism is sin. As marking the disorderly would publicly identify those from whom we are to socially withdraw, equally important, this also identifies to the church those whom we are to admonish. There is no way faithful Christians can admonish one disorderly if they do not know who he is or what he has done, which works against the divine purpose. It is ungodly for such elders to think they have actually lawfully marked the unruly, if they have not done so openly and by name among their own.

Some elders have even been known to refuse to openly teach the doctrine concerning some questionable behavior, and they furthermore charge the congregation not to study the scriptures involved or discuss their application privately with one another. Instead, they advise the congregation that the elders have conclusively studied the matter and demand that the church simply submit to their word, whether it be to withdraw or to fellowship. This is overlording in its highest form (1 Pet 5:2, 3). A church ought to relieve any such elder of his office.

3. Disagreement among the elders

When Paul decrees that we should all speak the same thing, it pertains to matters of doctrine, not matters of opinion (Tit 2:7, 8, 15). Disagreement among us over opinions is unavoidable, and forbearance must then be exercised (Eph 4:2). However, if the elders of a church disagree over who should be marked for withdrawal, this is not a case for forbearance. This indicates a serious doctrinal or moral division among them, not a mere difference of opinion or preference. One or more of them must be in error. Marking an erring brother under the supervision of a divided eldership is essentially a declaration that there is sin in the eldership. This can only lead to confusion, which is not of divine origin (1 Cor 14:33). Sheep cannot follow two shepherds going in different directions. If this would occur, our study will show that one or more of the following are necessarily involved:

- Showing favoritism or partiality (James 2:4),
- Lacking patience with a weak member (1 Tim 3:3),
- Failing to recognize what actually constitutes sin (Heb 5:14),
- Misunderstanding the difference between doctrine and opinion (Rom 14:1),
- Failing to fully investigate and confirm the sinful activity (Matt 18:16),
- Allowing fear or pressure from others to be the motivator (Gal 2:12).

Jesus says to first remove the log from our own eye before attempting to remove the speck from a brother's eye (Matt 7:3-5). This is not a suggestion; it is an imperatively stated command. Otherwise, we prove ourselves hypocrites. Before taking action, these problems must be corrected, even to the point of removing an unqualified elder from office if necessary (Tit 1:9).

A simple example of unity is seen in Acts 15. Here, there is disagreement in the church concerning circumcision, and the Jerusalem elders meet together with the apostles to discuss it (vs 5, 6). This problem involves doctrine, not opinion, so together they make sure every word is established before telling it to the church (vs 22, 23). We can be certain that if one of those elders had persisted in false doctrine, he would have been rebuked and removed from his office. He would not have been allowed to hold the rest hostage to his will nor would they have moved forward while allowing him to be the voice of dissension within the church (Gal 2:4-6).

4. Action of the collective church

God is requiring us to perform due diligence here. Withdrawing is typically a traumatic experience for parties on both sides. Following God's pattern insures that we do nothing rashly or not well thought out.

*1 Tim 5:19-22 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. **Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.***

Whether "lay hands on" refers to appointing one as an elder or rebuking an elder for his sin (as the context might suggest) - either way - the instruction to be not hasty is clear. The built-in safeguard against wrongful actions, according to the God-ordained pattern, is that the whole church is ultimately to be fully informed and openly involved in the admonishing and marking process, not just a few "decision-makers" in the church behind closed doors. Clearly, the Lord's intention is that the whole church rises up as with one unified voice to implore the sinner to repent. Such unity, not only among the elders but among the whole church, will have the greatest effect to win the erring brother.

God in His wisdom provides a clear, effective plan to follow, even if disorderly members abide in a church not having men qualified as elders. Moreover, if it were to be the elders themselves ensnared in sin (Acts 20:28-30), Christians among them are given the divine authority to take the necessary action, calling upon the congregation to deliver a rebuke and even publicly marking and withdrawing from them should it be required (1 Tim 5:19-21).

E. Continuing Action

Withdrawing and admonishing should be continual actions, not one-time events. The original words both to withdraw and admonish in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15 are in the present tense, meaning action occurring in actual time: "the idea of progress" (Dana and Mantey). The withdrawing therefore should not stop after one has been duly marked; it is not fulfilled in a single public announcement. We ought to continue withholding personal association until he repents. Likewise, the admonishing ought to continue as situations avail, especially if he is receptive and willing to listen.

Nevertheless, some apparently think there is a point in time when the requirement to withdraw and admonish expires. Human reasoning proposes that if a fair amount of time has been devoted to withdrawing and admonishing and the disorderly Christian shows no signs of shame or remorse, the withdrawing and admonishing have obviously not accomplished their desired effect and can consequently be discontinued. One problem with this idea is that there is absolutely no scriptural authority for it, and we ought not be acting without authority. There are practical problems as well. As this is entirely a matter of personal judgment, some may suppose the requirement to withdraw and admonish has expired while others are convinced it has not. Then, there will be some Christians having close social contact with the one disorderly and some not. This inconsistency will only make the ones who are still admonishing and withdrawing appear "unloving." The fact of the matter is that resuming the close social contact actually sends the message that everything is okay with the one whose faith is shipwrecked, which is the most unloving thing anyone could do! Besides, we are in no position to judge that an erring Christian has reached the point of being calloused beyond the effectiveness of chastisements we could offer.

IV. Those From Whom We Are To Withdraw

A. Withdrawing From Unfaithful Christians

The types of sinners from whom we are to withdraw are compiled from the relevant verses as follows:

- Sinners who refuse to repent after being admonished (Matt 18:15-17),
- Those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ (Rom 16:17),
- Fornicators, the covetous, extortioners, idolaters, revilers, and drunkards (1 Cor 5:9-11),
- A brother or sister who walks disorderly (2 Thess 3:6),
- One who would not obey the apostles' teaching (2 Thess 3:14),
- False teachers and those who turn away from sound words (1 Tim 6:3-5),
- Men of all ungodliness: arrogant, selfish, hateful, abusive, slanderous, unholy, etc (2 Tim 3:2-5),
- Contentious people generating quarrels and strife (Tit 3:9),
- A factious man following heresy (Tit 3:10, 11).

For practical application, all and any sin in which a Christian would persist indicates a reason to withdraw. Nevertheless, these verses have endured a great deal of manipulation throughout time. For example, some have argued that since Matthew 18:15 reads "sins against you" in some translations, we are only to withdraw when the sin is against us personally. However, 2 Thessalonians and Romans 16 enjoins withdrawal from any who walk disorderly or offensively, contrary to the doctrine of Christ. Moreover, the fornicator in 1 Corinthians 5 sinned only against God, himself, and his wife, yet the whole church is commanded to withdraw.

Some have reasoned that those sins worthy of our withdrawal are limited only to those heinous sins specifically listed in 1 Corinthians 5. In hermeneutics, specific recorded examples of a thing do not become limitations upon generic recorded instructions. Those lists are understood to be representative. Murderers and liars are sinners from whom we should obviously withdraw, but they are not specifically listed. Besides, the list in verse 10 is different from the one in verse 11, which further indicates they are merely examples.

Some have reasoned that Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3 is only ordering withdrawal from those who refuse to work, since the disorderly behavior mentioned in the context is laziness, specifically. Again, specific examples do not make generic statements become specific; this is simply not a forced conclusion in the context. For example, when Paul instructs the Corinthians to withdraw from fornicators (1 Cor 5:9-11), this is not limited to only those who have their father's wife, even though this is the specific kind of fornication in the context (vs. 1). In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul uses not the specific word for idleness in reference to withdrawing but the more generic word for unruliness, meaning all behavior not aligned to God's law. We ought to take him at his word.

Finally, some have argued that one who would teach falsely but do so not openly but only privately, claiming the matter to be merely his opinion, is not actually a false teacher. Moreover, some have reasoned that if a man teaches a falsehood but does not practice it himself, he is perhaps not actually a false teacher.

These are all effectively excuses for escaping the responsibility to withdraw from a brother in sin. People will sometimes look to the commentaries and ask elders or preachers how they think these scriptures should be applied in practice. Even when their statements have no foundation in scripture but in their own personal judgment about what they think is beneficial, credibility and significance are often placed on their input, especially when a favorable solution is suggested. Moreover, false teachers will claim that we should not be dogmatic but be open to any opinion on the matter, since the subject is very complicated,

and the scriptures are not clear. However, diligent study will show otherwise; God has made His will clear, and it is not that difficult to understand, if we will renounce man's word and accept the Lord's.

B. Withdrawing From Unfaithful Churches

We have observed so far that the scriptures instruct us to withdraw from unfaithful Christians in two ways:

- Personally or individually, that is, Christians withdrawing from erring Christians,
- Corporately as a group, that is, churches withdrawing from erring Christians.

Further study will indicate two other modes of withdrawal, based upon the reciprocal nature of fellowship.

1. Christians withdrawing from erring churches

We occasionally hear today of Christians who are compelled to withdraw themselves from churches due to persistent false teaching or unauthorized practices in the work and worship among them. No examples of such withdrawing can be found in the New Testament writings, because during those days, the falling away had not yet occurred. Paul foretells the apostasy to come in graphic detail, indicating evidence of its development even in his time (2 Tim 4:3, 4; 2 Thess 2:1-12). He likewise forewarns the Ephesian elders that the coming perversion would arise precisely from among the elders themselves (Acts 20:29, 30). Part of what was restraining its coming was no doubt the work of the Holy Spirit, as there were indeed occasions when miraculous intervention quelled falsehoods (Acts 5:1-12; 13:8-11). There were certainly problems in churches in those days, but they were being convincingly dealt with by the apostles and first-century prophets (3 Jn 1:9; Rev 2, 3).

Today, religious error runs unabated in many places; however, in the absence of any examples of such withdrawal, the scriptures nevertheless instruct the faithful Christian to withdraw from an apostate church. When a church is no longer willing to do or teach the right things as a body and the elders are no longer willing to listen to admonitions, it is time to cut ties with such and separate ourselves from those unfaithful who practice lawlessness, whose "candlestick" is being removed for lack of repentance (Rev 2:5).

*2 Cor 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what **fellowship** has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." Therefore **"Come out from among them** And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."*

2. Churches withdrawing from erring churches

The New Testament shows how churches in the first century cooperated with one another, particularly in benevolence to needy saints (2 Cor 8:1-4). A church in one region recognized churches in other regions as being like them in faith, commending them and thus having fellowship with one another (Rom 16:1-5, 23). Churches of Christ in the early days did not recognize groups in errant religion, such as Judaism and Paganism, as being like them in faith (1 Cor 10:20), and they did not cooperate as a body in benevolence with those religious bodies. It stands to reason that if individual faithful Christians need to break fellowship with erring churches, then faithful churches as corporate bodies ought also break fellowship with erring churches, refusing cooperation in benevolence or commendation. Light simply has no fellowship with darkness (Eph 5:11; 1 Jn 1:3-7).

Some will argue that, due to local body autonomy, the teachings and practices of one church are not any business of other churches. This is not true. Autonomy is not the issue here. This is about one church fellowshiping another, not controlling another. Fellowship is based on shared beliefs. If two churches teach different doctrines, there can be no fellowship, else one participates in the sin of the other by consent and association. Therefore, one church most certainly needs to know what another church is

teaching with whom they would claim fellowship. This is exactly what takes place in Acts 15. Paul and others in Antioch make the heresy in Jerusalem their business. Fellowship should be based on more than being a so-called "church of Christ" and not supporting human institutions. Otherwise, there is no basis for not fellowshiping every religious institution known to man. If the elders at one church tell the elders at another church it is none of their business what they teach, they are without doubt trying to conceal sin. Truth does not fear interrogation. Tolerating error will be further discussed later in this study.

V. Those From Whom We Ought Not Withdraw

Having considered those from whom we should withdraw, we look now at those from whom we ought not withdraw.

A. Non-Christians

Scripture makes clear that we are to withdraw only from those who were once faithful Christians but have fallen into persistent sin, refusing to repent even after repeated admonitions. Accommodatively expressed, we are to withdraw from erring Christians, not alien sinners. Paul explains that we would otherwise need to withdraw from practically the whole world (1 Cor 5:9, 10). More will be said about this when we later examine the purpose of withdrawal.

B. Weak Christians Growing In Faith

God's word reveals that we are to withdraw from Christians who, while knowing better, willfully and deliberately live in rebellion to God's law despite warnings. All Christians differ in their degrees of knowledge and therefore in their degrees of faith. Some are more spiritually mature than others, and no matter how mature we may be, we all ought to always be growing in our faith (2 Pet 3:18). The concept here is that God does not expect us to withdraw from simply weak, immature Christians. For example, we would not consider interrogating new converts immediately after their baptism regarding matters of deep doctrine, such as divorce, institutionalism, or the operation of the Holy Spirit, and marking them as heretics if they answer wrong. Instead, we patiently teach them, giving them time to grow and go from milk to solid food.

Rom 15:1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Heb 5:13, 14 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

1 Thess 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

C. Those With Opinions Different From Ours

An examination of the distinction between matters of doctrine and matters of opinion is a topic of study all on its own. It is sufficient for this study to note that such a distinction is tangible and discernable. Paul gives us great insight on this in Romans 14, utilizing vivid examples.

Romans 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Notably, Paul makes clear that the beliefs over which we ought not judge another are those things which are neither right nor wrong in and of themselves. For example, some people are of the opinion that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews; others think he didn't. As long as you accept it as the word of God and abide by therein, it makes no difference either way. We ought not withdraw over such matters of indifference.

D. Penitent Christians

In reconciliation, as when a sinner turns to God, the relationship is restored exactly back to its original state (2 Cor 5:17-20). Therefore, when an erring Christian repents, the time for marking and withdrawing is past. Since he is now reconciled to God, it is fully time that he be reconciled to others and to the church as a body.

Some elders have been known to place members essentially on probation for a time after their repentance, as if waiting to see if they mean what they say. The probation might not be formally stated, but it is effectively real nevertheless and often evident by a restriction for a time from teaching and from leading prayer and other worship forms. Imagine the frustration one must feel who knows he has made things right with God but is still on shaky ground with the church for an indeterminate time until such men are appeased. This is wrong. Paul urges the Corinthians to restore the penitent fornicator from whom they had formerly withdrawn, warning that the overwhelming grief from such unnecessary punishment might cause him to slip back into Satan's grip:

2 Cor 2:5-11 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent -- not to be too severe. This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 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, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

When restoring a penitent brother, we ought not think too highly of ourselves over another but remember that we are all sinners at God's mercy.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Luke 17:3, 4 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him.

E. Necessary Relationships

A distinction needs to be made between that which is necessary and that which is not. To reiterate, withdrawing in this consideration does not apply to those within the essential, God-ordained structure of one's own immediate household but rather to those outside in casual associations. This conclusion is forced by that which would otherwise contradict divine law. For example, if a faithful Christian's own Christian wife is marked as disorderly, he has no right to shun her in their home, putting her away. Only for the cause of fornication does God permit this (Mat 19:9). This is because their eating together and other such activities are necessary elements of their relationship, not casual social encounters. Notwithstanding, the faithful Christian in this relationship will need to honor the obligation of those outside to withdraw. He should understand that this is no occasion for merry-making but a very serious condition in which he ought to accommodate the will of God and admonish his wife that she might repent. He needs to realize that he is in the best position to have a positive influence on his erring wife and not try to undermine the efforts of the brethren and the church as a body to put her to shame. This is not the time to invite brethren to a purely social or recreational event with her while they are endeavoring to obey the instructions to withdraw. Instead, invite brethren to a home Bible study with her. If the erring wife is unwilling to participate in such a Bible study where she could receive an admonition, then we certainly ought not compromise and socialize as if nothing has changed, rewarding her for her unfaithfulness and putting the word of God to disrepute. Some might think this is unreasonable, but this is completely feasible, and we are in no position to argue with God. This is no viable basis for pursuing some variant doctrinal interpretation.

A similar condition would be of those caring for their elderly parents in their household as divinely appointed (1 Tim 5:4), should they be disorderly Christians. This also is not a casual relationship but a necessary one. More discussion concerning family members will come when we examine the purpose of withdrawing.

F. Those Wrongfully Marked As Disorderly By Others

In 3 John 9 - 11, Diotrephes is seen wrongfully putting brethren out of the church and forcing his ruling upon others. He even falsely accuses the apostle John himself and disfellowships him! If wrongful marking could happen then, it can certainly happen today. John reveals his intention to deal with the matter in person and admonishes them not to follow the evil. Likewise, today, wrongful marking is sin and brings about much evil, which needs to be exposed and reprovved.

We must bind only where God has bound and loose only where has God loosed. Therefore, it is just as wrong to withdraw from someone whom we ought to fellowship as it is to fellowship one from whom we ought to withdraw. Let's look more closely now at the problem of wrongfully withdrawing.

VI. Wrongfully Withdrawing From Faithful Christians

A. Withdrawing Without Admonishing

Our study shows that we are to individually withdraw, simply stated, only from a Christian who walks disorderly, that is, one who persistently sins in disregard to warnings. Today we hear of some "withdrawing from the withdrawn from," even though they have no knowledge of his disorderliness. If he was wrongfully marked and we accept that judgment and withdraw without personal investigation, we become participants in the sin. If we have occasion for social contact with him, we will most certainly have occasion, nay rather, duty, to inquire concerning the matter, if we learn that he had been marked. This in no way suggests that the judgment in one church is to simply be ignored by other churches or individuals. This is an opportunity for a healthy check and balance. After careful, unbiased inquiry, we may confirm for ourselves the reason to withdraw and reinforce the matter with further admonition. However, with inquiry, we might otherwise discover a wrongful marking and find we have no reason to withdraw. Fundamentally, if no disorderliness is established, then there is nothing for which to admonish him. If there is no cause to admonish, then there is no right to withdraw. The command in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15 conjoins both withdrawing and admonishing; we have no authority to do one without the other. Incidentally, in such a case where we discover that other brethren have wrongfully marked a faithful brother, we ought to admonish those brethren and turn away from them if they refuse to repent. This will be examined further when we discuss tolerating sin.

Furthermore, if we consider ourselves to be in a position to withdraw from someone, we ought to know specifically the sin for which to admonish him. It is nonsense to admonish him for being withdrawn from. Some will withdraw from another and simply admonish him to make things right with the church who marked him. However, if the church falsely accuses him and is no longer willing to discuss the matter with him, it is impossible for him to reconcile with that church. This is an unreasonable demand, and a faithful Christian ought never be put in such a position. Instead, such a church needs to be marked as one in heresy.

In too many cases, to avoid confrontation, people are not diligent in their own investigation. Where reports are conflicting, instead of investigating further to find the truth, prejudice and favoritism prevails, and the easy path is taken. Then, the one falsely accused is sometimes simply disregarded and unjustly made to suffer.

B. Binding Judgments

Some are suggesting that the judgments of those who are called as witnesses (Matt 18:16) and of the church (vs 17) to mark individuals as disorderly carry all the force of a divine oracle. The continuing dialog of Matthew 18 is cited for this:

Matt 18:18-20 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 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. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

These verses have suffered a fair amount of misapplication through the years, and they are today being used by some in the church to declare that whenever a local church as a body marks a Christian as disorderly, the entire brotherhood is obliged to honor that marking as if by God's ordination without question or investigation on their own. This has a striking resemblance to the doctrine of infallibility *ex cathedra*, for which Catholic dogma would cite this passage for support. This is simply placing inordinate power in the words of men, and it is certainly not what Jesus is saying. This idea denies the possibility of false accusations and wrongful markings, which are undeniably possible.

Let us now examine what Jesus is actually teaching here. To begin, Jesus is not declaring that absolutely anything two or more faithful men agree to on earth becomes the divine will of God. Neither the church nor even its elders are in such a position of legislative or judicial authority; this resides in Jesus alone (Matt 28:18; Eph 1:22). To further harmonize, note that in the original text "bound" and "loosed" in verse 18 are both in the perfect tense, which indicates action which has already been accomplished in the past and is existing in its completed state. Accordingly, the New American Standard Version renders it "shall have been bound" and "shall have been loosed." To understand the passage, the limited context of marking the disorderly must be applied. Jesus is affirming that when brethren act cooperatively in accordance with His judgments and the authority of His word, He is with them, fellowshiping and endorsing them, no matter how difficult the task. This is consistent with Paul's instructions to the Corinthians.

1 Cor 5:3, 4 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....

The judgments we execute are only the righteous judgments of the Lord; we are merely His instruments. No one can act in defiance of divine will and claim that God approves. Scripture instructs us to look carefully (Heb 12:15), discern what is good (Rom 12:2), find what is acceptable (Eph 5:10), judge soundly (1 Jn 7:24), test the spirits (1 Jn 4:1), and prove all things (1 Thess 5:21) based upon the truth of God's word (1 Jn 4:6), not following after the words of men (Tit 1:14).

C. The Motivation Of Fear

Ungodly elders might try to rule a church by threatening to mark as divisive those who would speak out against their unauthorized teachings or practices. Instead of listening to admonitions, such elders will rebuke any who would so speak for being disrespectful, chafing at the elder's authority, being harsh, and maliciously gossiping.

Unmoved by intimidation, the faithful Christian needs to take a stand for truth. When done in gentleness and humility, standing for truth is by no means an act of divisiveness or rebellion. We ought never allow ourselves to be motivated by the fear that we might be wrongfully accused and marked (John 7:13). Take a stand for truth, and trust that God will deliver (Heb 13:5, 6). Besides, it is better to have fellowship with God and be wrongfully condemned by men than to have fellowship with men but be condemned by God (Matt 10:28; John 12:42, 43; 1 Pet 3:17).

VII. The Purpose Of Withdrawing

Scripture reveals at least three goals to be achieved by withdrawing.

A. To Restore The Unrepentant

The instructions of Paul to the Corinthians reveal that one purpose of withdrawal is to attempt to save the sinner from the peril of the Lord's judgment.

*1 Cor 5:4, 5 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, 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.*

In the case of this man, fortunately, the desired effect was accomplished, as we previously observed from the second Corinthian epistle.

1. By putting him to shame

To draw a non-Christian out of the world and into obedience, God's only plan is that we declare to him the gospel, which reveals the love of Christ demonstrated by His blood on the cross. However, in the case of a Christian who goes back into the world, the message concerning Christ will have no effect on him; he already knows these things. As a last resort, God's only other plan for us to win him back is to attempt to make him feel sorry by putting him to shame (2 Cor 2:7; 2 Thess 3:14, 15). This relates back to our discussion concerning from whom we are to withdraw. We do not withdraw from an alien sinner; to him we can offer the gospel message. However, we can only attempt to shame the erring Christian into repentance by withdrawing, because the message of the cross to him has become ineffectual.

Heb 6:4-6 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

Heb 10:26, 27 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

The act of shaming also relates back to what is involved in withdrawing. It is the personal aspect that particularly causes sorrow. If we let him know the choice he has made means we can no longer go fishing, golfing, to the movies, or out to dinner together anymore, it ought to make him feel ashamed, which is the divinely intended effect.

Some people have apparently concluded that they have a better plan than God's to bring an erring Christian to repentance. Instead of withdrawing, they do exactly the opposite: showering him with attention and including him in all social functions. The idea is to overcome evil by doing good, heaping "coals of fire on his head," (Rom 12:19-21) so he will see how much he is loved in spite of his sin and feel ashamed. The only problem is that this contradicts the Lord's specific command to shame him by withdrawing. This is "right-if-good-comes-from-it" reasoning. Even if this method works in some cases, that does not make it right. However, the typical result is that the sinner simply enjoys the association without feeling any shame. Then, those trying to follow the Lord's command to withdraw are made to appear unloving and shameful, and their effectiveness is voided. To the contrary, love is perfected in doing the Lord's will.

We noted earlier how withdrawing pertains to casual associations, not necessary relationships integral to households. For example, if Christian children are living within the household, they are to be in subjection to their parents. If they become sinful and disorderly, it is the parents' divinely appointed responsibility to bring them under control. It is unlawful for parents to throw under-age children out of their house. However, when children become of age and refuse to submit to their parents' authority, it is time for their departure. This is not this writer's opinion on how to raise children. God has ordained the parents to have rule over the children of their household and for the children to submit. When this is no longer the case, sin is the result, which must be rectified.

Some people have categorically declared that withdrawing does not apply to family members, yet no scripture is offered to validate such an encompassing statement. Look again at 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15; these two verses are not in contradiction. If the admonishing is to be done as you would treat a brother, that doesn't mean the withdrawing is not as you would treat a brother. The withdrawing applies to a brother or any other family member the same as the admonishing does. Scripture indicates no such exception for family in general. We have certainly established the limited application involving necessary household relationships, but regarding relationships outside our households, those most familiar to us -- our extended family -- are the ones whom we can most readily bring to shame by withdrawing. When it comes to an erring son or daughter, this might be the single most difficult thing God calls upon us to do. Consequently, far too often, the ones poised to have the greatest effect fail.

Matt 10:34-38 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;' and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

We commonly see people with the long-held conviction that they should withdraw even from extended family members but who change their position when it finally must be put into practice. Truth ought not be so subjective.

2. By punishing him

In his earlier epistle, Paul had sternly reprimanded the Corinthian church for their negligence in many things, including tolerating a fornicator among them rather than mourning and withdrawing themselves and putting him out from among them (1 Cor 5). Apparently, the words had their desired effect, and the brethren carried out the Lord's instructions.

2 Cor 7:6-12 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.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 a while.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.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.

These actions evidently also lead to the fornicator's restoration. In Paul's further exhortations to the church regarding the forgiveness and restoration of the offender, he characterizes the actions that had been taken by the church by the divine directive to bring about this end as "punishment."

*2 Cor 6:4-11 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 majority is sufficient for such a man,⁷ so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort 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.*

We ought not to shrink away from the notion that the intent of withdrawing is anything less than a punishment. Nevertheless, this punishment is not to be done out of ill will or self-vindictiveness but out of love and concern.

3. By delivering him to Satan

The Holy Spirit cannot use stronger language to describe the dire situation of an erring Christian, yet we fail to recognize the seriousness when we disregard the Lord's instructions concerning this. The concept of social shunning seems severe enough, but Paul calls for a delivery to Satan.

*1 Cor 5:4, 5 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, **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.*

*1 Tim 1:19, 20 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, **whom I delivered to Satan** that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

Note that with both times Paul uses this expression, he emphasizes that the sole intent is their salvation. When one is abandoned to become a part of Satan's domain, he might more easily see that "the way of the unfaithful is hard" (Prov 13:15) and come to his senses in the swine fields (Luke 15:15-18). The eternal destiny of a soul is at stake here.

We need to see this for what it truly is: a saint renailing Christ's hands to the cross, profaning His precious blood, and throwing away his inheritance. Until we recognize the utter deplorableness of falling away as God sees it, we cannot appreciate the need to withdraw. Consider God's viewpoint on a Christian who falls back into sin:

Heb 10:28, 29 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Rev 3:15, 16 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."

Some people think withdrawing is cultish, cruel, and unloving, likening it to the shunning known in some Middle-Eastern religions and by extremists. We must not pay attention to what men say and think but rely fully on God's word (Acts 4:19). When we understand the will of God, our place is simply to do it, no matter the consequence. It is the most loving thing we can do (Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19).

B. To Keep The Church Pure

1. A good reputation

Turning again to the context of 1 Corinthians 5, note that Paul's concern for the fornicator is initialized by what is becoming the reputation of the church.

1 Cor 5:1 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!

Those who persistently sin yet are allowed to remain among the congregation tarnish the name of the church and give occasion for the world to blaspheme (Rom 2:24, 2 Pet 2:1, 2). This diminishes the effectiveness of the body; the call to godliness will appear hypocritical from those among whom ungodliness abides.

1 Tim 5:14, 15 Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan.

Herein lies the significance of the marking. The reputation of the church is spared reproach if a public pronouncement declares that the sinner is not a part of the body.

2. Purging out impurity

Consider what Paul says vividly about the spread of evil:

*1 Cor 5:6, 7 Your glorying is not good. 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, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

*2 Tim 2:16-18 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like **cancer**. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have*

strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

We understand how leaven works (Matt 13:33), and we know too well how a small cancer can spread throughout the body. The recognizable original word above translated "cancer" is GAGGRAINA {gang'-grahee-nah}, meaning, "a gangrene, a disease by which any part of the body suffering from inflammation becomes so corrupted that, unless a remedy be seasonably applied, the evil continually spreads, attacks other parts, and at last eats away the bones" (JHT). Paul's point is that even a little sin tolerated in the church will grow and spread to others by the power of evil influence and bad examples (1 Cor 15:33). Sin in a church needs to be cleaned out.

Those who seek to justify their toleration of sin within the eldership of a church will argue that there is some error in all churches, saying, "There's no perfect church." Since you have to worship somewhere, they decide simply to abide in a convenient church with the least amount of error: only "a little leaven." This begs the question about how much error it would take for one to actually break fellowship with an apostate church. Paul says to purge it out: even the little.

Nevertheless, to answer the argument, we established earlier that churches are filled with people in all different levels of faith and understanding. Members are described as sheep, and some weak members might certainly struggle with matters of deep doctrine or be confused on details of moral issues. However, simply because the church is patiently teaching them does not mean the church is embracing false doctrine or tolerating immorality among them. Moreover, even if some weak members are confused on certain issues, it is certainly unacceptable that unsoundness would reside among the shepherds of the flock (Tit 1:7-9).

3. Removing the offense

One kind of sinner specifically identified as one from whom we should withdraw is he who causes offenses (Rom 16:17). This sin itself speaks to the reason for avoiding the sinner. The word "offense" is from the original SKANDALON, which W. E. Vine indicates "originally was the name of the part of a trap to which the bait is attached." J. H. Thayer continues to define it as, "1) ...any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall, ... 2) any person or thing by which one is (entrapped) drawn into error or sin."

The point again is that the sins of others can draw us also into their sin. We are deceiving ourselves if we think our faith is strong enough not to be led astray and therefore think we need not withdraw. The language of Jesus is graphically laced with hyperbole here:

Matt 18:6-9 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. "Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

Remember that the evil influence toward idolatry was the reason the people of Israel were commanded to avoid the nations around them.

C. So That Others Also May Fear

Paul reveals that one reason for the Old Testament examples of Israel's punishment is so that we might be admonished and learn not to lust after the same things (1 Cor 9:6-11). When error receives punishment, others are not likely to follow; if error receives no punishment, others are encouraged to follow.

*1 Tim 5:19-21 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, **that the rest also may fear.** I charge you*

before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

1. The consequence of commitment

We need to understand the lifetime commitment purposed by God when we become a Christian. It is likened to a marriage (Eph 5; Jam 4:4). Without lawful cause, we cannot just say, "Please consider me no longer married to you" and walk away without obligation or consequence. Likewise, a Christian may become an erring Christian, but he never becomes again a non-Christian, else he would need to be re-baptized to be reconciled. Peter strangely explains that it is better to never become a Christian than to do so and fall away.

2 Pet 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

Much discussion has arisen regarding why their end is worse. Though the definitive answers are not necessarily offered here, the following are presented for consideration:

- Some suggest that their end is worse because knowing for eternity that you had life in your hand but threw it away would be mental anguish others would not endure. Maybe that's only part of it.
- Perhaps their end is worse while yet in this life because it is impossible to restore these to repentance, as there no longer remains a sacrifice for their sin.
- However, perhaps in part also their end is worse because God requires the shameful marking and withdrawing, not for those who have never obeyed, but for those who obey and then turn away.

Let this be a warning: if you are not intending on a lifetime commitment, do not bother becoming a Christian. You will only bring yourself shame. Notwithstanding, a far better thing is to know and faithfully follow Christ. Those who do so not only lay hold of eternal life but also enjoy the fellowship, edification, and association of godly people with like faith. God prefers that we obey Him out of love to receive His blessings rather than out of fear to avoid His punishments. Nevertheless, God accepts our obedience no matter which motivation drives us.

2. Attempts to avoid the consequence

Some erring Christians apparently think they have found ways to quit the church and at the same time escape the shame of withdrawal. One ploy is to first leave a church, claiming that they're going to find another local body to join. Next, they visit other congregations, but never officially join themselves to any. After a period of time, the first church forgets about them or assumes they have joined another. Meanwhile, none of the other churches consider them their responsibility, because they are not of their number. At this point, these Christians can abandon their faith, and no one will admonish or withdraw.

This is contrary to God's purposes; there is no love manifested in this. Shame on any church that would allow brethren to fall through the cracks like this. Christ has established His church that men might be saved, and He has ordained withdrawing as a means to that end. God's intention is that no Christian could ever inconsequentially quit the church. These churches are these brethren's last links to salvation. If these churches do not seek to recover these lost sheep according to God's will, they fail God, and they fail the brethren.

Acts 26:18 "...to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Jude 22, 23 And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

In another ploy, an erring Christian claims that he was not sincere back when he was baptized but did so outwardly only out of pressure from family or friends. Even though he was faithful afterward for years in worship attendance and even active in teaching programs, he yet further claims that he was never actually a "brother" and is therefore not a candidate for withdrawal. If this reasoning is valid, then God has provided a loophole. Anyone could simply voice this claim and automatically exempt himself from the shame of withdrawal. However, the old adage, "Actions speak louder than words," has scriptural validation (Matt 21:28-31; John 8:39; Titus 1:16). Our actions, not our words, reveal our true character. We must take his actions at face value and admonish and withdraw. Beware: any time we think we have found a way to thwart the will of God, we deceive ourselves (Gal 6:7).

VIII. Tolerating Sin

When saints are unwilling to carry out the corrective action commanded by the Holy Spirit, it can only indicate one thing: a toleration for sin. This is a sad condition for a Christian or a church, as God will ultimately hold us accountable.

A. Churches Tolerating Error

We can learn from the examples of churches in scripture who were chastised for tolerating false teachers. The church at Pergamos was rebuked because they had among them those holding and teaching the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:14, 15). Note that the church is rebuked not because men are teaching these things but because the church is allowing them to remain among them. These men should have been put out from among them (1 Cor 5:13). Examine also the rebuke to the church in Thyatira:

Rev 2:20-24 "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

Note that the Lord rebukes the church not because Jezebel is teaching falsely but because they are allowing her to continue to do so. Interestingly, in verse 24, to those specifically *not* following her teaching, He says that He places on them no *other* burden. If their only burden is to simply continue to reject her teaching, then He should not be rebuking them, for this they are already performing perfectly. Consequently, this "other burden" or task for them obviously is to stop allowing her to teach her falsehood. It is not enough for them to only privately advise her that she is wrong. Their prescribed work, in which they will be judged accordingly, is to mark, admonish, and withdraw if she refuses to repent (2 Thess 3:14, 15).

Remarkably, in both cases, it is not the false teachers who are directly charged with blame but the remaining members as a whole church who are tolerating it. Note also that the Lord does not even place the blame upon the elders. It is not the elders' duty to mark, admonish, and withdraw but the duty of the entire body and each individual (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:4, 5). As a body unwilling to carry out the God-ordained corrective action, they effectively give permission and actually empower the false teachers, thereby becoming participants in the sin.

As an example in the church today, some people, recognizing that a brother formerly among them had been wrongfully marked as disorderly, continue to fellowship the brother yet also continue to fellowship the church that wrongfully marked him. This idea of fellowshipping two at odds is the doctrine of Balaam, who sought in compromise to honor Israel and Moab at the same time (Num. 22:33; 31:16). To the contrary, fellowship is a cyclic, reciprocal relationship. If two men fellowship each other and both have fellowship with God, it should not be possible for a third man to have fellowship with one of the two but not the other. Sin resides there somewhere, which ought not be tolerated.

B. Consent By Association

John's inspired commentary on the encounter at Jacob's well with Jesus and the Samaritan woman is that "Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (Jn 4:9). Notably, the original word here for "dealings" indicates a using jointly with another (see Appendix). This corresponds to the kind of participation with others that Jesus indicates we should avoid in withdrawing (Matt 18:17).

We have already noted that the true intentions of man are revealed not by what he says but by what he does. If someone says with his mouth that he has broken fellowship with another but continues to declare by his actions that he still holds him in fellowship, the fact of the matter is according to his actions: he still holds fellowship. For example, John makes clear that one who merely gives passive consent to a false teacher, though not overtly teaching falsely himself, participates as if he is also doing the speaking.

*2 Jn 9-11 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for **he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.***

We hear all kinds of things being said while something quite different is actually being done:

- Some people think they can simply declare their opposition to certain teachings and practices in a church privately, yet remain among their number. With their words they disapprove, but when they pray, sing hymns, and take the Lord's supper together with them, "using jointly," they effectively declare their approval.
- Some people think that if they give their Lord's day contribution to some other church while still sharing in all other worship forms with an erring church, they have essentially eliminated their fellowship. No scripture will support the idea that fellowship is based upon monetary involvement alone.
- Some people actually remove their membership from the roster of an erring church but continue visiting their assemblies for worship. They claim they do not fellowship, but for all practical purposes, they consent by their actions. Besides, we have already established that corporate withdrawal alone is not enough; both corporate and individual withdrawing is required.
- Some people remove their membership from the roster of an erring church and also stop assembling with them for worship, however, they continue to join together with them individually in casual, social functions. We have already established that withdrawing is personally withholding association, even to the point of not eating with them. It is not sufficient to simply stop going to church with them; they need to be made to feel ashamed.
- Some people proclaim they are only temporarily remaining with a heretic church until their children go to college or they find a new job and can relocate. Though they may think this indicates a break in fellowship, it does not. It is a service of convenience, not of conviction. This is as silly as someone who says he is only temporarily a drunkard and therefore thinks he is not actually a drunkard.

These are all merely tactics for eluding the divine command to withdraw.

C. A Call To Action

Perhaps this study convinces some that they have not been doing right for some time now by fellowshiping an erring church or by socializing with disorderly Christians. As awkward and difficult as it may be, there is never a wrong time to start doing right. Furthermore, no amount of time spent in doing wrong can ever justify continuing to do it. If we see that we have been doing what is wrong, we should immediately stop doing it and start doing what is right. This is simply repentance, and it is demanded of all who would claim a hope of heaven (Luke 13:3-5).

However, in far too many cases, the number of those willing to tolerate error well exceed those willing to take a stand. When only those few separate themselves from an apostate church or withdraw socially, the

mass numbers are not made to feel any shame for their actions, because they share the comfort of one another while abiding in the error. Consequently, those few standing for truth are the ones who feel outcast, which is the opposite effect God intended. However, this should not come as a surprise; historically, in scripture, the faithful few are most often the ones downcast and abandoned by men, and the unfaithful masses are the ones receiving the praise of men (Heb 11:36, 37).

We teach our children the Bible stories about Abraham sacrificing Isaac, Daniel and the lion's den, and his three friends with the fiery furnace, explaining that we should also obey God no matter the cost, crucifying self (Gal 2:20). These are fine lessons, but when it comes to doing such a small thing as withdrawing, whether from an erring brother or an apostate church, we are too often unwilling to endure the burden, and our children learn by what we do instead of what we say. So we begin to complain about our condition and make excuses, thinking it is too much to ask. Perhaps we don't want to give up all the social benefits. However, the church is not a social club. Perhaps we have been through a lot of problems in the past and we just want to give up the fight. However, it is extremely doubtful that any of us in our country in these days will ever have to suffer persecution to the point of death. Be advised that God reserves a place for the cowardly.

Heb 12:1-4 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Rev 21:8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Appendix

A. Scripture References

All quotations are from the New King James Version, here and throughout.

Matt 18:15-17 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. 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.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Jn 4:9 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings [SUGCHRAOMAI] with Samaritans.

Acts 10:28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with [KOLLAO] or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Rom 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid [EKKLINO] them.

1 Cor 5:9-13 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company [SUNANAMIGNUMI] with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean 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 the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company [SUNANAMIGNUMI] 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. For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

2 Thess 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw [STELLO] from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

2 Thess 3:14, 15 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company [SUNANAMIGNUMI] with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

1 Tim 6:3-5 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, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw [APHISTEMI] yourself.

2 Tim 3:2-5 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away [APOTREPO]!

Tit 3:9-11 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject [PARAITEOMAI] a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

B. Definitions

All definitions are from J. H. Thayer. Pronunciation, occurrence, and word usage in the Authorized Version (KJV) are also included.

1. To withdraw, avoid, shun, etc:

EKKLINO {ek-klee'-no} • AV - eschew 1, avoid 1, go out of the way 1; 3 • 1) to turn aside, deviate (from the right way and course) 2) to turn (one's self) away, to turn away from, keep aloof from one's society 3) to shun one [Rom 16:17].

STELLO {stel'-lo} • AV - avoid 1, withdraw (one's) self 1; 2 • 1) to set, place, set in order, arrange 1a) to fit out, to prepare, equip 1b) to prepare one's self, to fit out for one's self 1c) to fit out for one's own use 1d) to prepare one's self, to fit out for one's self 1e) to fit out for one's own use 1e1) arranging, providing for this, etc. 2) to bring together, contract, shorten 2a) to diminish, check, cause to cease 2b) to cease to exist 2c) to remove one's self, withdraw one's self, to depart 2d) to abstain from familiar intercourse with one [2 Thess 3:6].

HUPOSTELLO {hoop-os-tel'-lo} • AV - keep back 1, shun 1, withdraw 1, draw back 1; 4 • 1) to draw back, let down, lower 1a) to withdraw: of a timid person 2) to withdraw one's self, i.e. to be timid, to cover, shrink 2a) of those who from timidity hesitate to avow what they believe 2b) to be unwilling to utter from fear 2c) to shrink from declaring, to conceal, dissemble [Gal 2:12].

APHORIZO {af-or-id'-zo} • AV - separate 8, divide 1, sever 1; 10 • 1) to mark off from others by boundaries, to limit, to separate 1a) in a bad sense: to exclude as disreputable 1b) in a good sense: to appoint, set apart for some purpose [Gal 2:12].

APHISTEMI {af-is'-tay-mee} • AV - depart 10, draw away 1, fall away 1, refrain 1, withdraw self 1, depart from 1; 15 • 1) to make stand off, cause to withdraw, to remove 1a) to excite to revolt 2) to stand off, to stand aloof 2a) to go away, to depart from anyone 2b) to desert, withdraw from one 2c) to fall away, become faithless 2d) to shun, flee from 2e) to cease to vex one 2f) to withdraw one's self from, to fall away 2g) to keep one's self from, absent one's self from [1 Tim 6:3-5].

APOTREPO {ap-ot-rep'-o} • AV - turn away 1; 1 • 1) to turn one's self away from 2) to shun, avoid [2 Tim 3:2-5].

PARAITEOMAI {par-ahee-teh'-om-ahee} • AV - refuse 5, excuse 2, make excuse 1, avoid 1, reject 1, intreat 1; 11 • 1) to ask along side, beg to have near one 1a) to obtain by entreaty 1b) to beg from, to ask for, supplicate 2) to avert by entreaty or seek to avert, to deprecate 2a) to entreat that ... not 2b) to refuse, decline 2c) to shun, avoid 2d) to avert displeasure by entreaty 2d1) to beg pardon, crave indulgence, to excuse 2d2) of one excusing himself for not accepting a wedding invitation to a feast [Tit 3:9-11].

2. To join, associate, accompany, etc:

SUGCHRAOMAI {soong-khrah'-om-ahee} • AV - have dealings with 1; 1 • 1) to use with anyone, use jointly 2) to associate with, to have dealings with [Jn 4:9].

SUNANAMIGNUMI {soon-an-am-ig'-noo-mee} • AV - company with 1, keep company 1, have company with 1; 3 • 1) to mix up together 2) to keep company with, be intimate with one [1 Cor 5:9-13; 2 Thess 3:14, 15].

KOLLAO {kol-lah'-o} • AV - join (one's) self 4, cleave 3, be joined 2, keep company 1, vr reach 1; 11 • 1) to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together 2) to join or fasten firmly together 3) to join one's self to, cleave to [Acts 10:28].

3. To exclude or remove from among a group:

EXAIRO {ex-ah'-ee-ro} • AV - take away 1, put away 1; 2 • 1) to lift up or take away out of a place 2) to remove [1 Cor 5:2, 13].

EKKATHAIRO {ek-kath-ah'-ee-ro} • AV - purge out 1, purge 1; 2 • 1) to cleanse out, clean thoroughly, to cleanse [1 Cor 5:7].

C. Withdrawal Flowchart

