

The Sword AND Staff

"Preach the Word." (II Timothy 4:2)

•

"Feed the Flock." (I Peter 5:2)

THE DOCTRINE OF DISFELLOWSHIP AS TAUGHT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT



By William E. Paul
623 South Maple Street
North Platte, Nebraska 69101

subject as how one becomes a part of it. Granted, it is not as popular or enjoyable a matter to tend to but it is a Scriptural matter. If we insist that only those who meet certain Bible conditions may become a part of the fellowship, we must also insist that those who meet other Bible conditions *be put away* from the fellowship of the church. To be a Bible people we have no more a choice as to whether we disfellowship the unrepentant than we do of having fellowship with the repentant! We must practice *both* according to the teaching of the New Testament Scriptures in order to please God.

I am fully aware that this subject is seldom taught upon and almost never practiced. Here are some of the reasons. It is certainly not a pleasant matter to have to deal with. Neither is a lung cancer operation particularly pleasant but it is often necessary to preserve the life of the person who has the disease. Churches must be in a good state of spiritual health in order to carry out church discipline. A person whose body is weak and run down is seldom scheduled for major surgery because he may never survive the ordeal. Churches must be relatively well set in order, with the Christians possessing sound, Bible-based

convictions and the leaders being capable of teaching the truth on the subject and overseeing a withdrawal of fellowship when necessary. Because of these and other reasons few congregations are found which practice church discipline.

While it is admitted that withdrawing fellowship is not always an easy or pleasant task, the consequences of failing to do so are disastrous. Congregations are plagued with all forms of worldliness so that they have no testimony for righteousness in the community. Modernism and denominationalism are permitted to thrive until such congregations hardly resemble the church described in the New Testament. So the world sits back and scoffs at the "hypocrisy" permitted to flourish in the congregations while convictionless Christians find all kinds of excuses for "putting it off" a while longer. An Associated Press dispatch from New York a few years ago lamented the failure of the nation's doctors to exercise proper discipline among their number. The item read: "A special committee of the American Medical Association yesterday declared doctors are not taking enough action to punish and discipline bad actors in the medical profession...Among causes for discipline is listed excessive fees, double fees, incompetence, unnecessary surgery, fee-splitting, narcotic or alcoholic addiction, abusing health insurance

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THE TERM "Church Discipline" is commonly used to refer to the responsibility of a congregation of believers toward one of its number who departs from the faith in doctrine or in life. This discipline is exercised by the church in the form of withdrawing fellowship from the person guilty of such conduct worthy of disfellowship. It is *not* an action of first approach in dealing with a wayward believer but rather one of last resort. It should be preceded by patient teaching, exhortation, reproof, rebuke and admonition. When all these efforts, backed up by prayer and motivated by love, *fail* to result in restoring the offender, the Scriptural teaching of withdrawal of fellowship is the *only* proper alternative.

How and under what circumstances one is removed from the fellowship of the church is just as much a Bible

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Proverbs of Today

Setting churches in order doesn't necessarily mean ordaining elders; sometimes it may mean just the opposite—having unqualified men, who are called elders, to step down.

"Our least valuable possessions are those which, when divided, are diminished."

When we cease to respect our sexuality, giving way to immorality and perversion, we cease to respect what sexuality produces—other human beings.

"When we no longer agree on the sinfulness of sin, it will be but a short time until we will not be agreed on the necessity of the atonement for sin and will also be ready to do away with a place of punishment for sin."

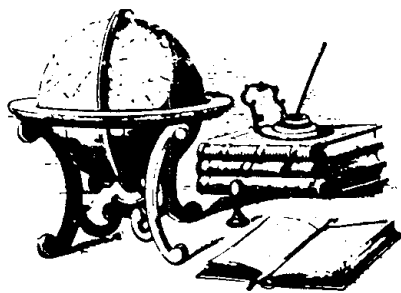
Doctrine in the head can never take the place of purity of life and God in the heart.

"It is not he who gives me a good thing, but he who stimulates me to do a good thing, who is my greatest benefactor."

The Christian in a swimming suit at a public beach or swimming pool is as much out of place as if he were at a bar or on the dance floor.

"Freedom is not the right to do as you please, but the liberty to do as you ought."

It is hard to respect the person who does not respect himself, and it is hard for the person who doesn't respect himself to respect other people.



EDITORIAL

COMMENTS...

"LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE"

WE BELIEVE that Christians should mean something to one another if Christ means anything to them. God's children should be very special to one another if God is special to them. If we love the one who shed his precious blood for us, we will likewise find those who have been purchased by his blood precious and dear to us.

But in this day of apostate and nominal "Christianity" this is not always the case. It is not unusual to find Christians with more attachment and affection (more in common) with outsiders than with those of the household of faith. (Perhaps this is indicative of our low spiritual level and the lack of reality in our religion today).

Beloved, this should not be. The beloved apostle John wrote, "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (I John 3:14). The apostle Peter penned words along the same line. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Peter 1:22, 23).

Do you get the picture? By the new birth we become spiritual brothers and sisters. People who are brothers and sisters are in the same family. Brothers and sisters do not have to put forth an effort to love one another—it comes naturally. Likewise "we know that we have passed from death unto life" (that we are in God's family) because it comes "natural" to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. As Peter said, because we are born again we should have unfeigned love of the brethren. We are in the same family.

In the early days of the church the reality of this love prompted the rich to sell their property and share their means with their poor brothers. The church took care of its widows and needy. We find the strong bearing the infirmities of the weak. In honor men preferred one another. Although slavery was not formerly renounced, it was practically nullified among Christians, since the master and servant became brothers (and brothers in a very real, precious, eternal sense).

We need more of the family feeling and brotherly love among Christians today. All should be concerned about the spiritual and physical needs of one another—not selfishly live to themselves. The church "treasury" should not be something held aloft and "sacred" for only a church building, and such superficial matters, but it should be for the definite needs of people (including spreading the gospel). Our religion has become too "institutional" and formal.

This brotherly love should pervade all of our relationships with other Christians. This writer remembers well attending a camp gathering of Christians in a distant state a few years ago. The trip was so long that we had to spend the night on the way before we got there. Knowing this, a brother in Christ invited us to stay that night at his house (which we did), although he was not at home that week. He told us where to find the key. While enjoying the brotherly fellowship at the camp, we learned that another brother from the Mid-West had done the same thing. The brother in whose house he stayed was gone (as was our case), but he had never personally met him.

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Setting the CHURCH in ORDER

(Note: The first part of this message appeared in last month's issue, and this is the concluding part. It was originally presented on June 27th at the BRUSH ARBOR MEETING, Fairfield, N.C.)

• By James E. Gibbons

III. QUESTIONS CONCERNING SETTING THE CHURCH IN ORDER.

1. What are some prerequisites to setting the church in order?

(1) *We must have a deep respect for the Word of God.* It is the God of Heaven speaking, and not man. It is the Word of our salvation and light of our souls. We shall be judged by it. We must believe, as Paul reminded Timothy, that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," and that it will make us "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16, 17). We need to be like the Bereans, of whom it is said, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

But the great stumblingblock in the way of setting many churches in order is traditional-minded brethren. They are bound by old ways, which they have never taken time to consider in the light of the Scriptures. A bird kept in a cage usually won't fly out, though the door is left open. He enjoys the familiar, although he is caged up. Many brethren are afraid to leave their traditional ruts for the freedom and fullness of the New Testament.

We believe, in view of our circumstances today, that we should re-examine our stand on everything in the light of the Word of God. "Prove all things: hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21).

(2) *We must be poor in spirit.* This is a definite prerequisite. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for their's is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). To be "poor in spirit" is to see one's own spiritual bankruptcy in the sight of God; to see one's crying need. It produces what is brought out in the next three beatitudes: mourning, meekness, and a hungering and a thirsting to be right with God. This process and the necessity of it was seen in reference to the Corinthian church and the churches in Asia. Godly sorrow brought repentance and regained salvation for the Corinthians, which greatly aided Paul in setting the church in order there. Likewise, the churches in Asia were commanded to "repent."

This poverty of spirit, repentance, humility, is a must before a church can be set in order. But too many times today we are like the Laodiceans, who said they had "need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17). They were just the opposite of being "poor in spirit." However, in God's

sight they were "wretched and miserable." They were commanded to become "poor in spirit"—to "repent." Our need today is to have the capacity to recognize our need.

(3) *We must have a converted membership before a church can be set in order.* We make this as a statement. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot SEE the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The kingdom of God is spiritual. What does he mean by "see"? The secondary meaning of "see" is to "perceive, understand, appreciate." One must be born of the water and the Spirit before he can fully "perceive, understand, appreciate" the things of God. It takes such people to respond favorably in setting the church in order.

(4) *A spiritual membership is a definite necessity to setting the church in order.* Paul admonished the Romans to present their bodies a living sacrifice. Then he said, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1, 2). You recall the Hebrews were "dull of hearing" (understanding) because of their lack of study and spirituality (Hebrews 5:11-14). The apostle Peter gives the steps of Christian growth in II Peter, chapter one, then says, "But he that lacketh these things is blind: and cannot SEE afar off..." (1:9).

Many times a church cannot see, understand, or accept certain teachings because the members are not spiritual. The best thing to do in that case is to try to develop their spirituality, and then present the advanced doctrine. A child's tooth can be pulled better after it becomes loose than before. The progressive teaching and learning of the progressive revelation of God enters again.

2. What are some areas in which many churches need to be set in order?

We will not attempt to answer that question this time. There is too much involved. However, here are some questions we "throw out" for your consideration.

- (1) What is the nature of the New Testament?
- (2) Do churches understand the nature of undenominational Christianity?
- (3) Is it correct to speak of Christian churches AND churches of Christ?
- (4) What is the relationship of the New Testament church to denominationalism?
- (5) What does repentance really mean?
- (6) Have we learned how to pray?
- (7) What is a Christian's relationship to the world?
- (8) What does the New Testament teach concerning a Christian marrying a non-Christian?
- (9) What does the New Testament teach about modesty?
- (10) Should a Christian drink and smoke?
- (11) Should a Christian dance and go to the movies?
- (12) Should a Christian belong to the Lodge?
- (13) Should a Christian engage in carnal warfare?
- (14) What does the word "holy" really mean?
- (15) What is the organization of the New Testament church?

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DOCTRINE of DISFELLOWSHIP...
(Continued from Page 1)

plans, padding insurance claims, performing abortions, and advertizing... Some county societies go for years without considering a disciplinary procedure." If men in a purely secular profession can be alarmed over the existence of contempt for ethics within their number, how much more should those professing the name of Christ be concerned about the purity of His body, the church! And especially when the infallible Word of God gives specific instructions as to the persons, the reasons, the motives and the procedure for withdrawing fellowship.

The purpose of this message is to unfold the doctrine of disfellowship as taught in the New Testament by asking and answering from the Scriptures three simple, direct and important questions.

I. DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH THAT A CONGREGATION SHOULD EVER WITHDRAW FELLOWSHIP FROM ONE OF ITS NUMBER?

We will pursue the answer to this question by systematically considering the various passages in the New Testament which bear on the subject of disfellowship.

MATTHEW 18:15-17. This passage occurs in a setting prior to the establishment of the church. However, as part of the teaching given by Jesus to his apostles, it forms the basis of doctrine on the subject of disfellowship which was to become a part of the Christian system. In reading this passage you will note that the procedure, step by step, is given for dealing with an individual member of the Lord's body. After all efforts to restore a breach between believers have failed, the unrepentant person is to be regarded as a Gentile and publican (verse 17). To the Jewish mind this clearly indicated a severance of fellowship in both the religious (Gentile) and social (publican) realms. So even before the church was established the idea of withdrawing from a sinning member was being firmly implanted in the apostles' minds.

ROMANS 16:17. This verse tells us that certain ones in the church at Rome were to be "marked" (or identified) and then "turned away from." This seems quite clearly a reference to the church practicing disfellowship of one of its number. Moses Lard makes the following comment in his

Commentary on Romans page 463: "This turning away amounted to a withdrawal of fellowship; and the withdrawal was to continue so long as those withdrawn from continued to produce divisions. It was a separation of true brethren from false and, without reformation, it was final." It would seem difficult to find a clearer statement of the fact that the New Testament church was to practice withdrawal of fellowship as part of its compliance with inspired Scripture.

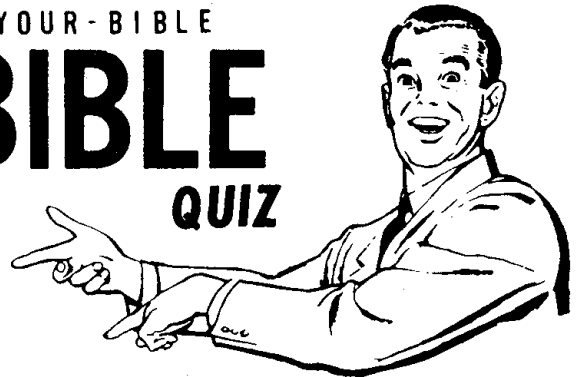
I CORINTHIANS 5:1-13. This is one of the most detailed accounts of the church's responsibility to withdraw fellowship given in the New Testament. A member of the Corinthian church was found guilty of gross immorality (incest) so the church, in harmony with the apos-

ties' doctrine, was commanded "in the name of our Lord Jesus" to "deliver such a one unto Satan" (verses 4 & 5). This is described in verse 7 as "purging out the old leaven," an obvious reference to the permeating effect of evil in the midst of the congregation in the form of this impenitent, wicked person who was part of the church at Corinth ("among you" verse 1). Paul later explains this action to mean that the Corinthian church was to "have no company" with such a sinner (verse 9). It is crystal clear that he is speaking of their withdrawing from one of their own number by his reference to "a brother" in verse 11. Finally, he says, "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves" in verse 13. What further proof is needed that the

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KNOW-YOUR-BIBLE

BIBLE
QUIZ



1. How does the Bible describe the people of the earth in the time of Noah (just before the Flood)?
2. Of all the people on the earth only how many were saved on the ark when the Flood came?
3. How long were Joshua and the Israelites involved in conquering the land of Canaan?
4. What place did Caleb want for his inheritance in the promised land of Canaan?
5. How old was Joshua when he died?
6. What are four different names for the Sea of Galilee found in the Bible?
7. Who said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"?
8. Of whom did Jesus say, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile!"?
9. Who said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee"?
10. What was Jesus talking about when he said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"?

(Answers found elsewhere in this issue)

A FORMER CATHOLIC LADY writes...

“FROM WHERE I SIT”

• By Mrs. Mary Ann Blanshan

A CATHOLIC is made through diligent, strenuous and constant molding; which means my education in Catholicism was intensive and extensive. In the parochial school a one hour formal class in religion is held daily, plus the fact that all other facets of education are religion-centered. Do you realize that in the majority of devout Catholic homes the “instilling of religion” begins at the cradle? Hands are taught to be folded and to make the sign of the cross; the mind is instructed at an early age to begin memorization of a multitude of prayers. This perhaps is imperative, because few who have not been exposed to the vastness of Catholicism in its entirety, could begin to comprehend how many bits and pieces all this tradition and doctrine entails. There is a pat answer recorded somewhere for every question, situation, or ceremony which could possibly arise.

It seems as though a pompous type of piety is stressed. Reverence and devotion are aspects sought after merely for the sake of piety, reverence and devotion, (for if you act out holiness you are a *good Catholic*) as such they are quite empty. Religious ideas and ideals are inflicted on the individual externally, to be operated and and responsive like a puppet, without stressing the importance of having Christ living in one internally. The by-words are always, “Holy Mother the Church” this, or “The Church” that. By this I mean, “What does it say in the books?” “What is the Church teaching on the matter?” Not the Bible, mind you, but a papal decision or decree.

In twelve years of parochial school I never read out of the Bible. One studies about the Bible, and Bible history books are provided telling selected Bible stories. Some portions of the Mass are selected Scriptures, but other than these it is a sin for the individual to interpret the Bible. One is compelled to accept the Church’s teaching on any given matter or circumstance. You could name anything and there is a “Church teaching” on it.

A “good Catholic” looks neither right nor left, for this is sin. An individual is drilled into the negative attitude of dwelling more on the sinfulness of an act, rather than the positive force of living out and though the love of Christ. The love of God and neighbor is dramatically overshadowed by the concern with sin and the penalty of Hell. This frequently is not deduced or comprehended by some Catholics even until the day they die. Just as long as they don’t commit any big sins, (and if they do, afford themselves of a prompt confession called the Sacrament of Penance) and if they say enough prayers, they will go to Heaven.

The concept which is neglected is for the individual to think out or through a moral problem or idea and reach a conclusion for himself. The sense of fear is exceedingly strong in this area, for what if the thought diverged from the teaching of “The Church”? This would certainly be a Mortal Sin, perhaps even heresy. Consequently, submission to church authority is an imperative way of life.

If more individuals would even dare to think, question, and reason for themselves, we definitely would have more Christians. For me, this *learning* to be able to think for myself and being brave enough to do so in matters of personal convictions, and asking my conscience what God expects of me as an individual, was the foundation on which rests my ultimate conversion. This independent thinking is a profound and often perplexing task, in fact, the most difficult. Can you possibly understand how easy it is to become smug and indolent when you’re told exactly what to do and what not to do? I mentioned the basis of my conversion, learning to think and to question forced-tenets that insulted my reasoning, logic, and common sense. Discrepancies in “Church teachings” and facts could no longer be accepted or ignored.

The quest for truth in a relationship with God created in me the most

terrible inner agony and turmoil that I have ever experienced. It seemed as if my soul transversed a private hell when I knew I could no longer sincerely believe and falsely practice that which all my life I had held dear. Desolation and near despair were my companions, and yet my heart told me that God is love—God is Truth. It was my duty to find the unwavering way, the straight way to Him. It seems as though God permits the “reaching of the bottom” of the “emptying-out” of the personality or individual so that a renovation process can begin from a near-void. God is an unfailing God. Without volition the Scripture verse came to me, “Ask and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.”

Conversion is like upsetting an apple cart and then beginning to pick up the apples and put them back into place. The transition from being rigidly dictated to, to independent freedom of decision is of paramount importance. We need help and patient understanding to grow from many uncertainties into valid convictions. New-found freedom to make moral decisions at times seems a formidable task; there is always the apprehension of, “What if I am wrong?” Visualize being unfettered and being responsible before God for your own human decisions. The habit of dependency on “Church authority” for answers has been one’s sustenance for so long. One does not totally “unlearn” in the course of a few years the patterns and impressions he has spent the greater share of a lifetime acquiring. I find myself wondering, and wanting to find out about every morsel in regard to my faith and God’s message to man. It’s surprising how an idea can shock you when you’ve never thought of it before. Have you ever seen a mountain for the first time? Or do you recall the thrill of a beautiful rainbow or sunset? That is only a faint inkling of how I feel about a concept or facet I now see in Christ.

In many instances we (as a Catholic) are painfully naive about what you consider necessary as church members; things that you take for granted we may view most seriously. On the other hand, we have old customs and traditions very precious to us which were once part of our way of life. You perhaps have difficulty imagining the significance and beau-

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DOCTRINE of DISFELLOWSHIP...

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New Testament teaches the doctrine of disfellowship? But there is much more.

II THESSALONIANS 3:6-15. The church in Thessalonica also had problems with ungodly people within its fellowship. What was it to do? Paul again commands solemnly "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" that the church "withdraw...from every brother that walketh disorderly" (verse 6). Specifically, he instructs that such persons were to be "noted" (that is, identified) for the purpose that "ye have no company with him" (verse 14). Language could hardly be clearer in indicating the church's responsibility to disfellowship those of its number who walk disorderly, refusing to repent of this sinful condition.

II TIMOTHY 3:1-5. Paul begins this chapter by enumerating the characteristics that would exist in persons during the apostasy of the last days. In the fifth verse the evangelist Timothy was explicitly required to "from these also turn away." By this command, Paul is obviously requiring Timothy to avoid fellowship with persons guilty of the sins listed. Both Albert Barnes and B.W. Johnson, in their commentaries, mention that the persons to be turned away from were religious people, and probably Christians. Barnes further comments, "Have no intercourse with them as if they were Christians; show no countenance to their religion; do not associate with them" (*Thess.-Philemon*, page 264). Since this passage makes reference to people being religious, Don DeWalt comments in his commentary on Timothy and Titus, page 237, as follows: "From what is here stated we could even imagine some of these men as members of the churches to which Timothy ministered...Paul instructs Timothy to withdraw fellowship from such persons." Thus an evangelist, laboring among congregations of Christians, is urged to turn away from, or withdraw fellowship from, such individuals who manifest ungodly lives.

TITUS 3:10. In this case another evangelist, Titus, is given similar instructions. Titus was required to "refuse" ("reject" or "avoid") those who were heretical or factious (that is, guilty of instigating divisions within the church by being opinionated). Notice that a first and second warning was to be given to the per-

son before he was finally withdrawn from.

We have examined briefly six New Testament passages which teach the doctrine of disfellowship. We noticed that the church was required to exercise discipline towards its unrepentant members. Such persons were to be regarded as Gentiles and publicans, to be turned away from, to be put away and no company kept with them, to be withdrawn from, and to be refused, rejected or avoided. Thus, our first question has received a Scriptural answer.

II. WHAT REASONS ARE GIVEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT FOR PRACTICING DISFELLOWSHIP?

It should be self-evident that anything which constitutes a reason for withdrawal of fellowship ceases to be a reason upon the repentance of the offender. Only after all legitimate attempts to bring about the repentance of the person have failed is the church obligated to exercise the discipline of withdrawing fellowship. In the event that further teaching, earnest prayer, exhortation and urgent pleadings and warnings bring about a godly sorrow which leads to the person's repentance, of course no such action as disfellowship by the church is in order. The New Testament does not give a timetable as to the length of time to be spent in efforts to bring about a restoration before disfellowship is practiced. This may differ in each individual case. Certainly love and patience should be exercised. And yet these must not be permitted to circumvent the responsibility of the church to withdraw fellowship when the individual shows no evidence or desire of repentance.

The New Testament gives certain specific sins which constitute the basis for withdrawal of fellowship. Note these as listed in the passages where disfellowship is taught.

I CORINTHIANS 5:9-13. This passage lists the following sins: Fornication, Covetousness, Idolatry, Reviling, Drunkenness and Extortion.

II TIMOTHY 3:1-9. This passage gives a much longer list. Notice them. Lovers of self, Lovers of money (covetous), Boastful, Haughty (proud), Railers (blasphemers), Disobedient to parents, Unthankful, Unholy, Without natural affection, Implacable (truce-breakers), Slanderers (false accusers), Without self control (incontinent), Fierce, No lovers of good (despisers of those that are good),

Traitors, Headstrong (heady), Puffed up (high-minded), Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Any of these charges, when proved to exist in a Christian's life, becomes a ground for withdrawing fellowship. As mentioned before, the withdrawal would take place only after efforts to bring the erring brother to repentance had failed.

Then, besides these specific sins as grounds for disfellowship, there are several general statements concerning sin which would cover any number of violations of the will of God not specifically mentioned.

In Matthew 18:15 we read, "If thy brother sin against thee." The particular sin is not named. Since this text goes on to teach that the brother who refuses to be reconciled is to be considered as a "Gentile," we have a case of withdrawal of fellowship for "sin" in general. Thus, whatever is "sin" is grounds for disfellowship.

In II Thess. 3:6 we have the case of withdrawing from a brother for "walking disorderly." In this instance it was being demonstrated by "working not at all" (verse 11). However, disorderly conduct in the sight of God could certainly take on various forms. So, in whatever way a person walked disorderly, according to the Scriptures, such conduct would be grounds for withdrawal of fellowship unless repented of.

In Romans 16:17 the reason given for turning away from a sinning brother is "causing divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to the doctrine which ye learned." Causing division is specific but the ways in which a person could do this are several. The reference to "occasions of stumbling" could refer to numerous ways in which a Christian could so sin as to lead others astray. According to this passage, then, any conduct that provides an occasion for someone to stumble also provides an occasion for the offender to be disfellowshipped. As you can see, this is a rather broad principle.

In a similar way Titus 3:10 gives a "factious man" (heretic) as reason for withdrawing fellowship. Causing division seems to be a prominent reason for having no company with a person. However, from the foregoing lists and general principles we can see that any sin in which a person persists, unwilling to repent even when every effort is made to help him, becomes the ground upon which the church may Scripturally withdraw

from him. So then, unrepentant sin, whether *specifically mentioned or prohibited by Bible principles* is a Scriptural basis for a disfellowship action by the church.

III. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE FOR WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP FROM A SINNING BROTHER?

First, let us clear up misconceptions that have come up concerning the purpose of disfellowship. It is certainly not "to get rid of someone we don't like." The person disfellowshipped frequently likes to see this story spread around. It takes the blame for his sin from him and places it upon the congregation. Neither is the purpose "to show how much better we are than others." Again, the unrepentant sinner gains some satisfaction if he can convince himself that the people of the church all "think they are better than everyone else." The truth is that Christians who administer church discipline by withdrawing fellowship do so with regret, saddened over the loss of a brother who chooses the road of sin instead of the highway to heaven. They are caused to look to themselves, "lest they also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Now let us turn to the Scriptural purpose for withdrawal of fellowship. It is threefold. First, it is to save the sinning brother. I Cor. 5:5 says, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." By the action of the church in delivering such a one to Satan it is hoped that he will be overwhelmed by the sense of God's disapproval of his sinful condition. In similar language Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan "that they might be taught not to blaspheme" (I Tim. 1:20). The humiliation of being withdrawn from is intended to bring such shame to the offender that he is led to repent of his sin. II Thess. 3:14 specifically says, "to the end that he may be ashamed." Being rejected by the congregation of God is a shameful and humiliating experience, or should be. If there is any sense of right and wrong left in the person, he should be brought so low over the disfellowship action that he comes to himself, repents of his sin and seeks reconciliation and restoration. Some say that this could never happen! But the New Testament anticipates this objection and so records an actual case of a brother who was withdrawn from becoming overwhelmed with sorrow and

shame that he comes back to Christ and is received back into the fellowship of the church. The person withdrawn from for incest (I Cor. 5) is urged to be forgiven and comforted by the Corinthian church upon his repentance (See II Cor. 2:6-8).

A second reason for practicing disfellowship is to maintain the purity of the church. Using the illustration of the effect of leaven, Paul shows in I Cor. 5:6,7, that a little evil, if permitted to remain in the fellowship of the church, can contaminate the entire congregation. By the phrase "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" Paul shows that unless the Corinthian congregation "purge out the old lump," that is, disfellowship the sinning member, his influence might work in the congregation, by word and example, to the undoing of the faithfulness of many of the saints. Hebrews 12:14 and 15 tells us that one Christian who falls short of the grace of God can create a troublesome situation in a congregation and "thereby the many be defiled." Then Paul gives us an actual case where the influence of Hymenaeus and Philletus led to the "overthrow of the faith of some" (II Tim. 2:17,18). Withdrawal of fellowship, then, is ordained of God to insure the purity of the church. Where this is not practiced corruption sets in and soon the whole church is effected adversely in life or doctrine.

Finally, the church should observe the practice of withdrawal of fellowship in order to obey Christ. In a sense every command of the New Testament affords a test of whether one is obedient to Christ or not. But in the matter under discussion we are specifically told that the requirement to withdraw fellowship was, in part, designed to determine the extent of obedience to Christ by a certain congregation. In I Cor. 5:9-13 Paul instructed the church to withdraw from the immoral man among them. In II Cor. 2:1-8 Paul instructs the church as to their attitude toward this person who had obviously repented by that time. Then in verse 9 Paul says, "For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye are obedient in all things." To put away the man in the first place appeared to be a difficult thing for the Corinthians. Then, to receive him back after he repented also appears to have been a problem with them. So Paul gives them instructions and then adds that their action in carry-

ing out these instructions would indicate their degree of obedience to the will of God (II Cor. 2:9). There may be congregations today who are obedient in teaching the plan of salvation, observing the Lord's supper, and in many other Scriptural requirements only to fall down in their obedience to the teaching on withdrawal of fellowship from the sinning member. The unpleasantness associated with exercising discipline becomes a fitting test of obedience to the Word of God.

Thus, we have answered three questions about the doctrine of disfellowship as taught in the New Testament. Is a congregation required to do it? Yes! For what reason is it to be practiced? As a means of disciplining the unrepentant sinner in the congregation. What is the purpose for using this means of discipline? To bring about the restoration of the wayward brother, to maintain purity within the congregation and to demonstrate obedience to Christ.

Is the congregation of which you are a part acquainted with the teaching of the New Testament on this little understood yet vital subject? Does it practice this teaching as the need may be? May this message help to clarify the doctrine and to encourage obedience to it. □

(Brother William E. Paul, author of this article, has also recently written a book entitled, *A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF ARMED WARFARE*. Whether you think a *CHRISTIAN* should take part in physical warfare or not, you should read this book. Most people are too emotionally involved to consider objectively such a question. But a sincere Christian should be able to consider all things in the light of God's Word. You may order a copy of this book from *THE SWORD AND STAFF*: cloth bound, \$4.25; paperback, \$2.95)

EDITORIAL COMMENTS...

(Continued from Page 2)

Upon coming back from the camp, a brother whom we had met at the camp spent a few days with us. When taking his leave of us, he firmly shook this writer's hand and said how good it was to have met another one of his brothers in this life.

We believe this is the way it should be.

"Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1). □

READERS'
... Response

FLORIDA:
■ "Please remove the name of Mrs..... of Gotha, Fla. from your mailing list."
WASHINGTON:
■ "I really enjoy your paper and learn a lot by reading and studying it. May God bless your labors and provide for your needs."
MICHIGAN:
■ "I think your articles are just fine about Christian nurture...don't drop the stand you have taken about women preachers, Elders of upright men and Elders of the local church."
NORTH CAROLINA:
■ "I have been getting THE SWORD and STAFF in the name of the church; it was coming when I moved on the field about four years ago, so I know I should have sent you a little help long ago. I don't want something for nothing so send THE SWORD AND STAFF to me in my name..."

PENNSYLVANIA:
■ "Recently in a dentist office I read a booklet "Objections to the Necessity of Baptism Answered." I would like to receive a copy of this book; also other that you publish on line of salvation. Thank you."

"FROM WHERE I SIT"
(Continued from Page 5)

ty some forms of ritualistic worship hold. Sometimes I long for lit candles and incense. One cannot deny that our church service, (better called external forms of worship) is totally different from Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal or Jewish.
Through my own misconceptions I owe several fine Christian people

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Setting the Church in Order
(Continued from Page 3)

- (16) What are the qualifications of elders and deacons?
(17) What is the work of the elder—who is the pastor of the church?
(18) What is the work of the New Testament evangelist?
(19) What does the New Testament have to say about women teaching and preaching over men in the church?
(20) Do man-made religious organizations usurp and replace the God-given plan for the church?
(21) Should the church observe special religious holy days?
(22) Do you believe in the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

3. Who is to take the lead in setting the church in order?
Everyone should be concerned and involved in setting the church in order, but God has ordained that the faithful preacher or evangelist take the lead in this field (Titus 1:5). That is part of the work of an evangelist. We gather this from Paul's epistles. We

a humble apology. It takes a long time with due reflection and prayer to come to an understanding of the true integrity of a sincere Christian individual. In my unjustified ignorance I mistook firm moral convictions for "Stonewall Stubbornness." I am still repelled by a lack of consideration for others' sincere beliefs. I hope I have grown slightly in comprehension to have the right attitude.
Conversion isn't merely switching from one denomination to another. It is the re-evaluation and reorganization of perspective; it is the complete giving up of one's self into Christ's hands. One dedicates his life and will, that he may serve God through Christ in the fullest measure of his ability.

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see it in reference to Timothy and Titus.
Many object to a preacher telling them what needs to be done or set aright, but Paul told Timothy, "These things command and teach" (I Timothy 4:11). To Titus who was left with the responsibility of setting the churches in order on the island of Crete, Paul said, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority, Let no man despise thee" (Titus 2:15). God has given the preacher enough authority to get the job done.
But this authority is exercised in love. It is in the frame of mind that a father would correct his child. Listen how Paul felt about the Corinthians. "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you" (I Cor. 4:4). And to the Galatians he wrote, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).

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ANSWERS TO "KNOW-YOUR-BIBLE"
BIBLE QUIZ

- 1. Genesis 6:5, 11-13; 2. I Peter 3:20; 3. Joshua 14:6-10—about seven years; 4. Joshua 14:12-14; 5. Joshua 24:29; 6. Sea of Chinnereth, Lake of Genesaret, Sea of Tiberias, and Sea of Galilee; 7. John 1:29; 8. John 1:47; 9. Acts 3:6; 10. Martyrdom—Revelation 2:10.

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