FELLOWSHIP AND RELATIONSHIPS

Kenneth D. Cohn

The idea that faithful Christians are in fellowship with one another and Christ is a well-established tenet of the doctrine of Christ. In fact, if you think about it, the whole Bible from start to finish is about fellowship: from the creation when man was in fellowship with God, how that fellowship was lost, how to regain and retain it, how to treat those who lose fellowship, and who not to fellowship. In Acts 2:42, we read “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” This passage, among others, establishes the case that fellowship among and between Christians is inseparable from the apostles’ doctrine. Scripturally authorized fellowship flows organically from the apostles’ doctrine and from no other source.

WHAT IS WALKING IN THE LIGHT AND SCRIPTURAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP?

The apostle John wrote the following in 1 John 1:1-4, (All scriptures are from the New King James Version unless otherwise designated).

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—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.

John is saying that he has declared and written certain things that the apostles have seen and handled respecting the Savior that would permit his readers to have fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and by extension, fellowship with them. John goes on to declare to them exactly how this fellowship is to be achieved. He wrote:

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 (1:5-7).

What was the message heard from Him and declared to John’s readers? It was that God is light and in Him is no darkness. Jesus said that “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). This message spoken was “the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3b). It was delivered by a declaration to the saints based on revelation. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:3-5:

How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:

So, the apostles all taught the same thing. The knowledge revealed to and written by Paul is the same as the apostles’ doctrine of Acts 2:42 and the message of 1 John 1:5 heard and declared by the apostles.

Paul further wrote in Philippians 2:14-16 to:

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse gen-

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Editorial...

THAT THEY MAY BE ASHAMED
(2 Th. 3:14b)

This study pertains to brethren (members of the Lord’s church) who have sinned (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17). They have erred from the faith, are thereby separated from God, and if they die in their sin(s) will be sentenced to an eternal hell by Jesus on the Day of Judgment (2 Pet. 2:20, 21; Luke 13:27). It also points out the necessity of faithful members of the Lord’s church engaging in corrective church discipline to the point, if necessary, of scripturally withdrawing Christian fellowship from erring church members who refuse to repent of their sin(s). Of course, each case of corrective church discipline must be dealt with according to the facts involved therein. It also presupposes that we understand what Christian fellowship is. (Please read Kenneth D. Cohn’s article beginning on the front page of this issue for a discussion of Christian fellowship.) If one does not understand the foregoing, then what is withdrawn from an erring member of the church will not be understood.

The church scripturally withdraws fellowship from erring brethren for two reasons, (1) as a “last ditch” effort to bring the obstinate erring church member to repentance, and (2) to keep the church pure in life and doctrine (1 Cor. 5:4-8; 2 Cor. 2:6-10). As Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren concerning permitting error to exist in the church, “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). In Galatians 5:9, Paul expresses the same sentiments to the Galatian churches that he expressed to the Corinthians concerning correcting erring church members. The church is not to tolerate sin of any kind in its members in life and/or doctrine. Those who tolerate sin in the lives of church members, themselves commit sin and are subject to corrective church discipline (Rev. 2:14-16, 20:3:15-19). Further, a church or a church member, does not have to completely apostatize from every component part of the New Testament system of faith before said discipline is to be applied (Mat. 18:15ff; 2 The. 3:14; Gal. 6:1).

We begin by noticing the apostle Peter’s rebuke of the erring babe in Christ, Simon. Simon sinned when he sought to buy from Peter the power to confer miraculous gifts on Peter. Peter rebuked Simon for two reasons, (1) to keep the church pure in life and doctrine and (2) to keep the church pure in doctrine. Simon’s sin was not merely a moral sin, but a sin of worship. Simon sought to buy from Peter the power to confer miraculous gifts on Peter. Peter rebuked Simon for two reasons, (1) to keep the church pure in life and doctrine and (2) to keep the church pure in doctrine. Simon’s sin was not merely a moral sin, but a sin of worship. Simon sought to buy from Peter the power to confer miraculous gifts on Peter. Peter’s loving, proper, and sharp response rebuked Simon with the following words:

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me (Acts 8:21-24).

Also, to the church at Thessalonica Paul declared,
Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Th. 3:6).

In verse 6, the Greek word translated “disorderly” is ataktos, a military term, meaning to be “out of step.” Brethren, who live disorderly are failing to conduct themselves as the Lord authorizes them to live or they are engaging in that which the Lord specifically prohibits. Thus, they are “out of step” with the will of heaven and are in violation of Colossians 3:17. Thus, they are not walking by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; also see Rom. 10:17 and Heb. 11:6). Therefore, such erring brethren, having rejected all scriptural overtures of faithful brethren to bring them to repentance, are to have the Christian fellowship of the church withdrawn them.

Paul wrote to the Galatian churches, saying: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault (trespass—ASV, 1901), ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Thus, Paul emphasized the obligation of faithful members of the church to discharge their duty in seeking to bring an erring child of God to repentance.

James also wrote:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19, 20).

Again, James is emphasizing the need of faithful brethren to be deeply concerned about erring brethren and the faithful member’s obligation to attempt to bring them to repentance.

Paul commanded the church at Corinth, “Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor. 5:13b). Language could not be clearer—the rebellious unrepentant child of God is to have the Christian fellowship of the church withdrawn from him/her.

THOSE WHO ARE TO HAVE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP WITHDRAWN FROM THEM

In the foregoing, we learned what the duty of faithful church members is toward their erring brethren regarding bringing them to repentance, why such is the case, and what is to be done with those erring church members who refuse to repent of their sin(s). With the foregoing in mind, please note the following list enumerating the sins of brethren, who, if they refuse to repent of them, are to have the fellowship of the church withdrawn from them.

2. Those who will not work (2 Th. 3:11).
3. Busybodies (2 Th. 3:11).
4. Divisive (factious, ASV–1901; Tit. 3:10).
5. Those causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine (Rom. 16:17).
6. Those not abiding in the doctrine (2 John 9-11).

7. Fornicators, the covetous, idolators, revilers, drunkards and extortioners (1 Cor. 5:11).
8. All who will not repent of their sins whether they are of commission or omission (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17; Mat. 18:15-17; 25:41-46).

AFTER FELLOWSHIP IS WITHDRAWN, THEN WHAT?

What is the relationship of faithful children of God to those who have had the fellowship of the church scripturally withdrawn from them? Please note the following list revealing what faithful church members are to do concerning scripturally withdrawn from erring members. The faithful are:

1. To note who they are (Rom. 16:17; 2 Th. 3:14; Phi. 3:17, 18).
2. Not to keep company with them (2 Th. 3:14; 1 Cor. 5:11).
3. Not to eat with them (1 Cor. 5:11).
4. Not to receive them into your house (2 John 10).
5. Not to bid them God speed (2 John 10, 11).
6. To treat him as a heathen and a publican (Mat. 18:17). To practically understand what this meant to the Jew, please read Peter’s comments regarding the Jews lack of fellowship with the Gentiles, recorded by the inspired Luke in Acts 10:28a. John Gill in his Exposition of the Whole Bible wrote that the passage applied would mean that, “the Jews might not eat,
nor keep any friendly and familiar acquaintance: and so such
that have been privately admonished and publicly rebuked,
without success, their company is to be shunned, and intimate
friendship with them to be avoided (https://www.studylight.
org/commentary/matthew/18-17.html).
7. To avoid them (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5).
8. To reject them (Tit. 3:10).
9. To count them not as an enemy but admonish as a brother
(2 The. 3:15).

NOT AN ENEMY BUT A BROTHER

Before leaving the previous list we want to discuss what
the meaning and application of point 9 is. Of the withdrawn
from brother Paul wrote: “Yet count him not as an enemy,
but admonish him as a brother” (2 The. 3:15). Surely,
Paul’s previous remarks are not teaching Christians that their
admonishments to withdrawn from church members consist
only of a kind but firm statement concerning their need to
repent, or how much such a person is loved, or that if said
members die in sin that hell awaits them. Indeed, whether
such and erring member agrees with the withdrawal action
or not, when all things have been carried out as taught by
the scriptures, the unrepentant child of God has been fully
informed regarding the same.

Of 2 Thessalonians 3:15, Mark Dunagan in his Com-
mentaries on the Bible wrote:

“And yet”: The Bible is always quick to “check” us from
falling into extremes. “Count him not as an enemy”: Morris
notes, “He is eager to see to it that what is done to him is from
the best of motives. The enforcement of discipline is a difficult
matter. It is easy for men to become censorious and unneces-
sarily harsh in the process. It is the rebuke of a friend. It is
most appropriate here with its combination of the two ideas
of a steady refusal to have any truck with the evil thing, and
a genuine concern for the well-being of the wrongdoer” (p.
259). Such statements remind us we always need to be careful
when we seek to correct others (Galatians 6:1). Barclay notes,
“The discipline which is given by a man who stands above the
sinner and who contemptuously looks down upon him seldom
amends. It is more likely to produce resentment than reforma-
tion. When Christian discipline is necessary it is to be given as
by a brother to a brother” (p. 253). This last statement reminds
us that the purpose for such withdrawal is to save the sinner
and not to destroy him.

Stott notes, “Paul betrays no personal pique or anger, and no
petty arrogance” (p. 195).

“Admonish him as a brother”: “But caution him as you would
a brother” (TCNT). “Correcting him like” (Knox). This should
remind us that the sin is not down-played or overlooked. Real
concern is expressed towards the eternal welfare of the way-
ward brother. That you give it your best effort when you try to
bring back a fallen Christian.

(Mark Dunagan Commentaries on the Bible. https://
www.studylight.org/commentaries/dun/2-thessalonians-3.
html. 1999-2014; As quoted at https://www.studylight.org/

Further, John Ellicott offered the following remarks con-
cerning the meaning of 2 Thessalonians 3:15. In his Com-
mentary for English Readers he wrote:

(15) Yet.—The original is simply And, which is much more
beautiful, implying that this very withdrawal from brotherly
intercourse was an act of brotherly kindness.

An enemy.—In the private, not the public, sense. “Do not
think of him as one with whom you must be at feud, to be
thwarted and humbled on every occasion.” St. Chrysostom
exclaims, “How soon the father’s heart breaks down!”

Admonish him as a brother.—How was this to be done
without “having company” with him? Perhaps the presbyters,
who the work of “admonishing,” or “warning,” specially
belonged (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:14),
to visit them in private with that object. Or possibly, the
admonition was to consist in the act of separation, and not in
verbal reproof at all.

(Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers. As quoted
at https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/ebc/2-

Whatever “Yet count him not as an enemy, but
admonish him as a brother” means, it does not countermand
or make null and void the Christian’s scriptural obliga-
tions pertaining to brethren from whom the fellowship of
the church has been withdrawn. They are repeated here. 1) To
note who they are (Rom. 16:17; 2 The. 3:14; Phi. 3:17,
18), 2) Not to keep company with them (2 The. 3:14; 1 Cor.
5:11), 3) Not to eat with them (1 Cor. 5:11), 4) Not to receive
them into your house (2 John 10, 5) Not to bid them God
speed (2 John 10, 11), 6) To treat them as heathens and publi-
cans (Mat. 18:17), 7) To avoid them (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim.
6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5), and 8) to reject them (Tit. 3:10). It is my firm
conviction from the teaching of the totality of the scriptures
bearing on this topic that when the foregoing is regularly
and consistently practiced by faithful brethren toward those
eering brethren as enumerated in the preceding list are truly the
brethren who are treating them as enemies.

ARE THERE ANY EXCEPTIONS
TO THE PRECEDING LIST?

Many years ago a sister in Christ declared she did not
believe that the New Testament taught Christians to with-
draw fellowship from their children who have erred from the
faith. Of course, those who do not want to receive with
meekness the engrained word that is able to save their souls,
regardless of the subject will figure out a way to justify themselves in disobeying God (Jam. 1:21; 1 Cor. 6:9). This is the case with this sister. In reality, because of her false doctrine she too was a fit subject for corrective church discipline and if necessary having the fellowship of the church withdrawn from her.

Does it ever dawn on such brethren as the previously noted sister that every member of the church is someone’s child? Indeed, some of them come from homes where all are Christians. Thus, in many cases when the church withdraws fellowship from an erring member, there are family members who are impacted by it. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the scriptural responsibilities of one spouse to another, or parents to their children, or children to their parents, or any family member does not change a thing regarding the obligations of the faithful to withdraw fellowship from unrepentant erring family members and that all must treat the withdrawn from members as previously listed.

**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING**

The following is anchored in reality and, thus, far more than hypothetical. Johnny was 12 years old when he obeyed the gospel. For a year or so he was faithful, but then he ceased to be interested in being faithful to the Lord. He became unruly and disobedient to his parents. Further, by the time he turned 16 years old he was running with a gang, committed crimes, and was on probation for his violation of the law. Despite all efforts of his parents, the elders of the church, and faithful brethren, Johnny refused to repent. Thus, the church withdrew Christian fellowship from Johnny, conducting itself toward Johnny as the New Testament teaches and as previously studied.

But Johnny is a minor and under the jurisdiction of his parents. Although Christian fellowship has been withdrawn from Johnny by the church, his parents continue to have biblical obligations to him as their child. If Johnny has siblings, Johnny’s parents must also be concerned about the impact Johnny’s rebellious life may have on the spiritual well-being of the whole family. Is it possible for Johnny’s parents to discharge their scriptural parental obligations to their son in the home as well as their scriptural obligations to Johnny as a brother in Christ who has been withdrawn from by the Lord’s church? The simple answer to the foregoing question is a resounding, yes. No one is saying that such would be an easy task, but what is the worth of a soul, especially your own child’s?

In this case, rather than being only one divine institution, the church, to treat Johnny as we have studied it must, there is another divine institution that not only can, but must exercise corrective discipline on Johnny. The second divine organization is the Godly home. All the church can do with Johnny or other church members who have had the fellowship of the church withdrawn from them is passive in nature. The church is to have no kind of association with Johnny that would cause anyone to think that Johnny’s conduct is characteristic of Christian living. However, Johnny’s parents are not limited in the home to passive action in their dealings with impenitent Johnny as they seek to make him ashamed of his sins and bring him to repentance.

Johnny’s parents are scripturally obligated to clothe him, house him, feed him, school him, exercise parental discipline towards him, and provide for his health care. They can bring to bear pressure on Johnny because of his being out of fellowship with God that the church is not authorized and cannot do. In the case of his clothing, it can be clothing with no frills, excepting when the occasions demand otherwise—funerals, worship, and the like. Johnny can have a place to sleep with no extras. He can be fed, but he must eat by himself in another room away from the family. He must forfeit Thanksgiving, Christmas, and all special meals with the family. He will continue to be subject to parental discipline as the need arises. He will attend worship and Bible study classes, but his parents will not permit him to experience the fellowship of the children his own age. He will be schooled, but in such a way as to keep him from those who are a bad influence on him. Anyone ever hear of home schooling? Johnny only gets the necessities of what God requires the home to provide for him. Cell phones, xboxes, computer privileges, internet, etc. are ruled out. Furthermore, if Johnny becomes a threat to the well-being of the home, his parents may turn Johnny over to the proper law enforcement officials. God’s church can and must do what we have previously listed to make Johnny ashamed of himself and bring him to repentance, but God’s home can do so much more than the church to cause Johnny to be ashamed of his sinful actions and save Johnny’s soul if it can be.

Where did we ever learn (certainly not from the Bible) that in such cases the church is the only institution that can work to cause one to be ashamed of his sins and help in bringing such people to repentance? Where has the New Testament given the Godly home “a pass” in exercising the needed corrective discipline on a child in our story such as Johnny, a story that is all too real today? Indeed, if ever a divine institution and its work needed to be restored according to the divine blueprint, it is the home and its work. Yes, the faithful church and the Godly home can work together in many ways to save souls and we have reviewed one way the home can do that. Sadly, few seemingly are thinking accordingly regarding restoring a family member to faithfulness.

But let us consider Johnny at 25 years old. No longer is Johnny a minor and under the jurisdiction of his parents. His parents no longer have the parental obligations to him they once did when he was a minor and under their jurisdiction and parental care. But Johnny has sinned and had the fellowship of the church scripturally withdrawn from him. Are we to conclude that all that the scriptures require of Johnny’s parents or other family relations is that they do the follow-
ship from them. Furthermore, if families are authorized by the New Testament to violate its teaching on the treatment of withdrawn from family members, then why cannot all members of the church, whether family members or not, conduct themselves in the same manner toward said erring brethren and for the same reasons?

WHAT ABOUT BRETHREN WHO ARE IN SIN, BUT NO CHURCH HAS FORMALLY WITHDRAWN FELLOWSHIP FROM THEM?

Sadly, most of us know of unfaithful brethren from whom no church has formally withdrawn their fellowship. Such neglect by said churches of what the New Testament teaches about corrective church discipline means that those churches not practicing the same are also guilty of sin. But, it must be acknowledged that faithful children of God are not required to wait on neglectful churches’ failure to submit to God’s will in said cases before the individual Christians not only can but must obey God in such cases. Can one begin to imagine David thinking that he could not personally face Goliath until King Saul and the army of Israel decided to meet the Philistine giant (1 Sam. 17:25-30)? Further, can anyone imagine a faithful member of the church at any time thinking one cannot comply with God's laws on fellowship and withdrawal of fellowship until a church first practices the same? If you do erroneously think in that way, as the late G. K. Wallace would ask those espousing error, so we ask you, “Who told you that?” Certainly, regarding our obligations to God concerning fellowship, or withdrawing fellowship, or any other obligation, the New Testament does not teach that before one can discharge our obligations to God we must postpone our compliance with God’s will until churches decide to obey God. Whoever heard of such a doctrine? As studied earlier, the home is a divine institution

ing: 1) Remind him that he is separated from God by his sins and lost, 2) that they are praying for him to repent, and 3) that he will listen to reason and scripture regarding the kind of life he is living? But wait a moment—in the process of the church scripturally withdrawing from Johnny, would he have not been informed accordingly on numerous occasions? Are we to think that familial relationships and the natural feelings existing therein mean that Christian family members are exempt from practicing what the New Testament obligates every faithful member of the Lord’s church to do regarding those who have had the fellowship of the church scripturally withdrawn from them? Such comments made by family members to their withdrawn from kinfolks do not constitute some sort of fanciful spiritual withdrawal of fellowship, that when it is said to the erring family member, it permits the family members to include them in family gatherings such as fishing and hunting trips, vacations, birthday parties, anniversary parties, all kinds of recreational activities, etc.

Where does God teach us by direct statement, implication, or example that the faithful are to determine how much fellowship they can extend to a withdrawn from church member on the basis of the kind of sin committed by the withdrawn from member? Indeed, the consequences of some sins are worse in this life than some others, but any sin separates one from God. What do withdrawn from family members care about some sort of fanciful spiritual withdrawal uttered to them and completely unknown to the New Testament, when they can continue with the family as if they had never sinned? It does anything but make them ashamed of their evil deeds whatever they are. Moreover, such erroneous actions on the part of families toward their erring kinfolks undermine what the church has done in withdrawing fellowship from them. Furthermore, if families are authorized by the New Testament to violate its teaching on the treatment of withdrawn from family members, then why cannot all members of the church, whether family members or not, conduct themselves in the same manner toward said erring brethren and for the same reasons?

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established by God for the good of man. If the church will not obey God concerning fellowship or withdrawing fellowship as the case demands, then Godly homes can teach and practice the truth on the same. If your home comprised the only Christians in a given area (no congregations for miles around) and one of the family sinned and refused to repent, would God expect that fleshly family, but also God’s family, to exercise corrective church fellowship to the point, if necessary, of withdrawing fellowship from one of their own fleshly brethren? If not, why not?

Whether erring church members have had a church withdraw fellowship from them or not, God has withdrawn his fellowship from them. Indeed, the church is authorized by the New Testament to withdraw fellowship only from those from whom God has withdrawn His fellowship. Thus, no faithful child of God can continue in fellowship with erring children of God who refuses to repent in one’s fleshly family or out of it. If one thinks to the contrary, on what scriptural basis does one do so? Whether members of our own fleshly families, longtime good friends or their families, or not, if a brother or sister in Christ commits sin and refuses to repent of it, whether a church withdraws fellowship from them or not, with faithful Joshua of old we say,

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Jos. 24:15).

All too often all that is involved in withdrawing fellowship is an announcement from the pulpit designating that a certain church member(s) has been marked for whatever the sin(s) may be, but then many church members continue in their associations with the marked members as if nothing has changed. Thereby, God’s work is undermined by His own people. Thus, we see that the whole church must faithfully practice what we have listed and referenced in several places in this study concerning those from whom God has withdrawn His fellowship. When a church will not discharge its duty in said areas, a Christian must not allow such dereliction of duty on the part of a church to hinder one from acting as God has authorized in the New Testament (Col. 3:17).

It does little to no good to complain and be outraged at brethren in the schools who violate God’s teaching on fellowship when we in our families and with personal friends are guilty of that which we correctly criticize the schools and other brotherhood activities for violating. They are not following God’s will in what they do regarding fellowship and some of us on the family level are guilty of the same—fellowshiping those who are not in fellowship with God.

IS IT COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO OBEY GOD?

However, nothing is ever counterproductive when we do what God said do, in the way He said do it, for the reason(s) He said do it, and when He said do it. When we find ourselves saying we believe thus and so, but it is not at all what the Bible says, then our belief is false.

For those Christians who have had family members that have had the fellowship of the church scripturally withdrawn from them or should have but it has not been done, please show from the scriptures how to deal with them other than:

1. To note who they are (Rom. 16:17; 2 The. 3:14; Phi. 3:17, 18).
2. Not to keep company with them (2 The. 3:14; 1 Cor. 5:11).
3. Not to eat with them (1 Cor. 5:11).
4. Not to receive them into your house (2 John 10).
5. Not to bid them God speed (2 John 10, 11).
6. To treat him as a heathen and a publican (Mat. 18:17).
7. To avoid them (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5).
8. To reject them (Tit. 3:10).
9. To count them not as an enemy but admonish as a brother (2 The. 3:15). Please see my remarks on this passage appearing earlier in this study.

We must remember that what implies a false doctrine is itself false. If one believes and teaches a doctrine that implies (or, for that matter, explicitly—just so many words declares) that Christians can treat church members who are out of fellowship with God in ways contrary to the foregoing scriptural list, then said doctrine is erroneous. Thus, when such is believed and practiced, it will cause brethren to engage in a kind of fellowship wholly unknown to the New Testament. That is not nearly it, that is it.

—David P. Brown, Editor

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21).
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eration, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

How does one shine as lights in the world? By holding fast to the word of life? Is the word of life any different from “the apostles’ doctrine” of Acts 2:42 or the “message” of 1 John or the “knowledge” of Ephesians 3:4 or “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” of Jude 3? It is not. Furthermore, the light of the gospel is the only thing that will dispel darkness (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2 Cor. 4:4). If we walk in the light as He is in the light, only then can we have fellowship with Him and one another. It is by that process of walking in the light that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses and keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

But we have yet to give the definition of fellowship. According to reputable Greek lexicons (Thayer, Arndt & Gingrich, Robinson, Bagster, et al.) the word fellowship translates the noun koinonia and the verb koinoneo, which mean communion, fellowship, sharing, communication, contribution, partner, and partner companion, etc. Thus, the things shared and the ones doing the sharing are organically connected.

There are two types of fellowship. One derives from walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and the other from walking in darkness (1 John 1:6, see also Eph. 5:11-14, 2 Cor. 6:14-15). The two cannot exist at the same time in the same person. It is little wonder, then, that Jesus speaks of the necessity of separating the two. He said that,

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. (Mat. 18:8-9).

What is the one who is walking in the light to do with the one who is not walking in the light, i.e., walking in darkness? As Jesus said and inspired apostle Paul writes, there must be separation. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Paul wrote,

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.

We were called into the fellowship of Jesus as Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 1:9: “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (See also 2 Thessalonians 2:14).

So, what is the process of separation? First, the one not walking in the light must be identified. In Romans 16:17, Paul urges brethren to “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.” In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, brethren were commanded in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from the apostles. Anyone acting contrary to the doctrine which they learned from the apostles is causing divisions and offenses. Any brother who walks not according to the tradition (i.e., the teaching of the apostles) is walking disorderly. It is these brethren from whom fellowship must be withdrawn if they will not repent.

WITHDRAWAL OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

What does this withdrawal of fellowship look like? Although the Jews got many things wrong about the coming of the Anointed One, one thing they did know was how to withdraw fellowship. Jesus said the following:

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 (Mat. 18:15-17).

The Jew would not have any social intercourse with a heathen or tax collector. You will recall what Peter said to those gathered with Cornelius: “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation” (Acts 10:28). This is how Jesus said to treat the unrepentant sinner, one who is walking disorderly. It would be presumptuous to try to modify His approach in any way.

Paul also had something to say about how to withdraw fellowship in 1 Corinthians 5:1-11.

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! And you are polluted, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among 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.

Paul records later a list of sins that could not be tolerated, by writing in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 that:

The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Are these not the things of the flesh that Paul seeks to destroy? Why, of course. In chapter 5, verses 6 through 8, the apostle continues to say that:

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

Even if the action taken against the erring brother does not bring about repentance, it will at least remove the leavening influence on the church that the unrepentant brother will have if he was not isolated. In verses 9 through 11 Paul writes further,

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company 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 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.

Why did Paul fail to mention the wife of the erring brother’s father? Was she not as guilty of sin as the erring brother? Indeed, she was. Since she was not mentioned, a reasonable assumption is that she was one of the sexually immoral people of this world (keeping in mind the principle laid down in 1 Corinthians 5:10. As the commentator Albert Barnes stated respecting Chapter 5 of First Corinthians:

We see the OBJECT of Christian discipline; 1 Cor 5:5. It is not revenge, hatred, malice, or the more exercise of power that is to lead to it; it is “the good of the individual” that is to be pursued and sought. While the church endeavors to remain pure, its aim and object should be mainly to correct and reform the offender, that his spirit may be saved. When discipline is undertaken from any other motive than this; when it is pursued from private pique or rivalship, or ambition, or the love of power; when it seeks to overthrow the influence or standing of another, it is wrong. The salvation of the offender and the glory of God should prompt to all the measures which should be taken in the case. (Barnes’ Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997-2014 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved).

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

What I may think about fellowship and discipline must be subordinated to God’s thinking on the matter. I have no right or authority to do any more or less than what has been commanded. Not one commandment on fellowship and the withdrawal of fellowship from brethren who are walking in darkness provides any exception for those with whom I may have a close and dear relationship.

Some claim that 2 Thessalonians 3:15 is an exceptional clause to verse 14, particularly when it comes to family members. Therefore, they would have family relationships in some respect qualifying the biblical teaching on fellowship. We never count an erring brother as an enemy. The very reason that we admonish an erring brother is because he is a brother that we love. So much the more when such erring brother is a family member. Remember, Paul made it clear that we can keep company with the sexually immoral people of this world (keeping in mind the principle laid down in 1 Corinthians 15:33), but not with an unrepentant erring brother. The very object of discipline of an erring family member who is also a brother is the same as with any erring brother.

Some would say that there are familial obligations that
remain after a withdrawal of fellowship from a family member. That is true, but it is a bridge too far to say that such familial obligations set aside the command of 2 Thessalonians 3:14. Does it make it more heart wrenching to apply verse 14 to a family situation? Yes, it does. Was it any less difficult for Aaron not to grieve for his two sons, Nadab and Abihu? I say not. However, it grieves any faithful Christian to have to note and withdraw fellowship from a brother in Christ.

Let us construct a hypothetical. Let us say that a spouse, child, or grandchild (all brothers or sisters in Christ) denounces God, Christ, the church, the Bible, and anything holy declaring that they are an atheist believing in none of the things they have denounced. The heartache that such a situation brings the faithful spouse, parent, or grandparent is beyond words. But how does that heartache qualify or in any respect set aside the commands respecting marking, noting, and treating such individuals as heathen and tax collectors? It does not. There is the notion by some that if we apply to them exactly what the scriptures command us to do, that we have no hope, or less hope than some other method, of restoring them. Quite the contrary, the last will and testament of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has already specified the method to be used. After all, this method brought about the repentance of the brother who had his father’s wife (1 Cor. 5). I trust His judgment more than any alternative I may prefer in particular circumstances.

I have no doubt that the grieving spouse, parent, or grandparent described in the preceding paragraph would not fail to let the unfaithful family member know in the strongest terms their disapproval of such behavioral and doctrinal errors and, then, make an appeal for their repentance. They may make it very clear to the unfaithful relatives that no “spiritual fellowship” exists between them and cannot exist until they repent. I do not, however, know what “spiritual fellowship” is in contradistinction to the fellowship talked about in the scriptures. The scriptures talk about two types of fellowship. Fellowship with God, i.e., those walking in the light which permits fellowship among those walking in the light, and those not walking in the light, i.e., fellowship with demons (1 Cor. 10:20), with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). The two cannot walk together because one walks in light and the other does not (Amos 3:3). Of course, all that we do or say while in this tabernacle of flesh has a spiritual consequence and dimension. The notion of a “spiritual fellowship” permits one to set aside the plain teaching on withdrawal of fellowship. The way this works in action is that the wayward children of God, who have now proclaimed themselves to be atheists, are told that he or she is out of “spiritual fellowship” with the faithful, just before the time that they all gather together to open Christmas presents and sit down for turkey and dressing and all the trimmings. The atheist spouse, child, or grandchild cares nothing about “spiritual fellowship,” but a great deal about physical fellowship. After all, they are atheists. Of course, they all have a great time visiting with one another, eating, opening presents, and reminiscing. This turns the teaching on fellowship on its head.

There is simply no way to get around John’s warning in 2 John 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.

The “whoever” of this verse leaves no one out, not even the dearest on earth to us. The church has repeatedly failed to observe the commandment from the Last Will and Testament of our Savior Jesus Christ respecting fellowship. Indeed, it is the Forgotten Commandment. And the church has suffered greatly as a result.

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THE PRESENT STATE OF PSEUDO-CHRISTIANITY

Roelf L. Ruffner

“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Mat. 7:20).

Have you ever bitten into a piece of fruit that looked so inviting and delicious, but the inside turned out to be rotten? If you had eaten it, you would have become sick. Often this is how religion is in our world. On the outside it looks shiny, resplendent, and harmonious. But is it?

The Bible warns us that the devil appears as an “angel of light” (1 Cor. 11:14). Thus, his agents have the same appearance. What pseudo-Christianity appears to be is often not what these man-made churches really are. Peel back the skin and you find the rotten fruit within.

What do I mean by “pseudo-Christianity?” Basically, it is those religious groups who claim to be Christian but do not have the New Testament as their standard, rule, and guide. Or, as our Lord alluded to them in the following question, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Their teaching, worship, and church government are not in accordance with God’s word (Col. 3:17).

Among those who claim Christ as their Savior, most, if not all, are products of religious division or denominationalism. These churches claim they are a part of the church or the body of Christ one reads about in the New Testament (Eph. 4:4). However, each denomination claims only to be a part of the whole. Their concept of Christian unity resembles the bickering United Nations rather than the body of Christ. Such a concept of the church in foreign to and condemned by the New Testament of Christ.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

A case in point is the ecclesiastical war going on inside the United Methodist Church (UMC). For many years this “united” denomination has had internal bickering and discord about whether to allow practicing homosexuals to be ministers and to accept homosexual or same-sex marriages. The 

Methodist Book of Discipline forbids both (the Bible long ago condemned both!?). Yet some UMC congregations in North America practice both. For many Methodists this dysfunctional family is the norm. One bishop commented at their recent General Conference, “The Methodist Church of America has united and divided and united and divided.” But to allow or even tolerate such ungodliness as homosexuality is another sign that this religious group is not the body of Christ. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret” (Eph. 5:11, 12).

Another religious group which puts forth a façade of Christian unity and piety is the Roman Catholic Church. The pope claims to be the head of the church and the “vicar of Christ” or Christ’s representative on earth. But, it has been revealed that the organization he oversees is a haven for pedophiles, homosexuals, fornicators, and sexual abusers, having been so for many years. The Roman church covered up the abuse of countless children by its priests and nuns until recently. For this reason and many more, it cannot be the church that Jesus built (Mat. 16:18).

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Mat. 18:5, 6).

The Roman church is well known for its opposition to abortion. Yet it does not discipline Catholic politicians who vote to support the murder of the unborn. I recently watched a television interview of an American Cardinal who refused to discipline Governor Andrew Como of New York who had just signed legislation allowing abortion until the time of birth or infanticide. He said the Governor’s action, while morally wrong, was a “personal matter” and the church could do nothing about it. This is hypocrisy! The church of the New Testament would have disfellowshipped the Governor or any other member who aided in murder.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 The. 3:6).

The children of religious division and apostasy will not find true Christian unity because they make it a practice to disobey the Bible (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-3). All who desire to be Christians must go back to the Bible for the pattern of true Christian unity based only on obedience to the word of God and not the inventions and traditions of men. As Jesus prayed 2,000 years ago,

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20, 21).

(https://religionnews.com/2019/02/26/united-methodists-pass-traditional-plan-strengthens-ban-on-lgbtq-clergy-same-sex-marriage)

—2500 Moore Court
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### DIRECTORY OF CHURCHES

**-Colorado-**

**Denver**—Piedmont Church of Christ, 1602 S. Parker Rd. Ste. 109, Denver, CO 80231, Sunday: 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. www.piedmontcoc.net, Lester Kamp, evangelist. (720) 989-8155.

**Cambridgeshire**—Cambridge City Church of Christ, meeting at The Manor Community College, Arbury Rd., Cambridge, CB4 2JF. Sun., Bible Study--10:30 a.m., Worship-- 11:30 a.m.; Tue. Bible Study--7:30 p.m. www.CambridgeCityCoC.org.uk. Contact: Inside the U.K.: Joan Moulton - 01223-210101; Postal/mailing Address - PO BOX 1, Ramsey Huntingdon, PE26 2YZ United Kingdom

**-Florida-**

**Ocoee**—Ocoee Church of Christ, 2 East Magnolia Street, Ocoee, FL 34761. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m. Wed. 7:00 p.m. David Hartbarger, Evangelist, (407) 656-2516.

**Pensacola**—Bellview Church of Christ, 4850 Saufley Field Road, Pensacola, FL 32526, Sun. 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 1:00 p.m. Michael Hatcher, evangelist, (850) 455-7595. http://www.bellviewcoc.com/

**-Montana-**

**Helena**—Mountain View Church of Christ, 1400 Joslyn Street, Helena, Mt. 59601, Sun.: 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m., Matt Bidmead (406) 461-9199.

**-Oklahoma-**

**Porum**—Church of Christ, 8 miles South of I-40 at Hwy 2, Warner exit. Sun. 10 a.m., 11 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. Allen Lawson, evangelist, email: allenlawson@earth-comm.com.

**-Texas-**

**Denton area**—Northpoint Church of Christ, 4224 N. I-35 (Greenway Plaza, just north of Cracker Barrel). Mailing address: 4224 N. I-35, Denton, TX 76207. E-mail: northpointcoc@hotmail.com. Website: www.northpointcoc.com. Sunday: 9:30, 10:30, 1:00; Wednesday 7:00. Contact: Dub McClish: (940) 218-2892; dubmcclish@gmail.com.

**Huntsville**—1380 Fish Hatchery Rd. Huntsville, TX 77320. Sun. 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 5 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (936) 438-8202.

**New Braunfels Area**—Church of Christ at New Braunfels, Meeting at Baymont Inn, 979 N IH-35 New Braunfels, TX, (Take exit 189 located on the South bound access road next to Applebees) Mailing Address: P.O. Box, 310064, New Braunfels, TX 78131-0064, Sunday 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

**Richwood**—1600 Brazosport, Richwood, TX. Sun. 9:30; 10:30 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (979) 265-4256.

**San Antonio/Seguin Area**—Nockenut Church of Christ, 2559 FM 1681, Stockdale, TX 78160, Sun. 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., Wed. 7:30 p.m., nkchurchofchrist.org

**Belvedere (Greater Augusta, Georgia Area)**—Church of Christ, 535 Clearwater Road, Belvedere, SC 29841, www.belvederechurchofchrist.org; e-mail belvecoc@gmail.com, (803) 442-6388, Sun.: 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m.,

**Denton area**—Northpoint Church of Christ, 4224 N. I-35 (Greenway Plaza, just north of Cracker Barrel). Mailing address: 4224 N. I-35, Denton, TX 76207. E-mail: northpointcoc@hotmail.com. Website: www.northpointcoc.com. Sunday: 9:30, 10:30, 1:00; Wednesday 7:00. Contact: Dub McClish: (940) 218-2892; dubmcclish@gmail.com.

**Houston area**—Spring Church of Christ, 1327 Spring Cypress, P.O. Box 39, Spring, TX 77383, (281) 353-2707. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., Wed. 7:30 p.m., David P. Brown, evangelist. Home of the Spring Contending for the Faith Lectures. www.churchesofchrist.com.