

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

The following article originally appeared as two chapters in the 1974 Freed-Hardeman College Lectureship book, pp. 208-218. The chapter titles were Fellowship 1 and 2 respectively. We have combined the articles into one, but left the footnotes as they originally appeared at the end of each chapter. Thus, the reader can easily discern where one chapter ended and the other began. The only changes we have made to the chapters is formatting them for CFTF.

With the continual growth over the years of a lack of desire among Christians to have Biblical authority for all they believe and practice, a lack of concern for doctrinal purity has followed consequentially in its wake. Thus, the toleration of sin among the churches has grown. The foregoing being the case, we chose to print the following regarding the New Testament's teaching on corrective church discipline leading to withdrawing fellowship from those members who persist in sin regardless of the overtures of faithful brethren to them, urging their repentance.

In view of some the activities of late at F-HU, especially in the art department, it would be highly interesting to see if F-HU would even tolerate such a sermon as the following article sets forth and once was preached on their campus. But we must remember many things have changed in the 47 years since these chapters were printed and the lectures delivered. Sadly, some of that change has been for the worse. However, God's truth does not change. —Editor

WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP

James Meadows

“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). Withdrawing fellowship is a matter especially deserving of our study today.

Two extremes are encountered in this matter: (1) misuse (abuse) and (2) nonuse (abandonment). For some church discipline has simply been an outlet for personal animosity. For others, church discipline is something to be avoided at all cost. Neither of these extremes is acceptable to God (Warren).

WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP OCCUPIES A PROMINENT PLACE IN GOD'S SCHEME OF REDEMPTION

Thomas Warren wrote:

Churches which fail in this point will fail in their mission of saving souls by **“holding forth the word of life”** ... Failure to purge out sin leads to a toleration of sin. Toleration of sin leads to a love of sin. Love of sin leads to a practice of sin. This Christ will not tolerate.¹

J. W. McGarvey, commenting on the effects of the discipline administered in Acts 5:1-11, asks:

When shall the rigid discipline which God established in the beginning be seen on earth once more? Let the shepherds of the flock give answer, as they remember that they must give account to God concerning the souls committed to their care.²

Alexander Campbell said,

Good discipline is as essential to the moral growth, peace, and prosperity of the church of Christ as good doctrine. Without it no society can long subsist ... That she (the church) may sustain her moral dignity, she must never display any partiality for evil doers, no leniency for transgressors. She must never pity the sinner so much as to forgive him to the dishonor of her Lord. Those who put her to shame: she must put to shame before she receives them into the bosom of her sympathy and affection.³

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Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
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Editorial...

MAY ONE CHURCH EXTEND FELLOWSHIP TO ANOTHER CHURCH?

The word *church* finds three different usages in the New Testament.

1) It means the one church Jesus built, containing all those Jesus has saved from their sins when they obeyed the Gospel (Mat.16:18; Acts 2:38, 47; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 1:16; 2 The. 1:8).

2) Also, the word *church* means the Lord's church in any geographic location, designated or not (1 Cor. 1 :2; Rom. 16: 16). Such is the largest and smallest organized entity of the realm of the saved.

3) The word *church* also designates an assembly of Christians convened for religious purposes (1 Cor. 11:18, 20; 14: 5, 23, 28).

The context of the verse in which the word *church* is used determines in which sense it is used. We may correctly conclude that in the question under consideration the word *church* means the largest and smallest organized entity of those saved by Christ—a church in any geographic location.

It must be understood that when one church extends fellowship to another church, each church must respect and adhere to the authorized organizational structure of sister churches as such is revealed in the New Testament (Col. 3: 17). One church has no authority over another church.

The first church of Christ on earth was the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2). All others came into existence after it. It is a matter of record that the Jerusalem church extended fellowship to the church in Antioch of Syria (Acts 13:1). The church in Jerusalem had authority to do so only because the church in Antioch “**continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine,**” or put another way, they were walking in the light as Christ is in the light (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:7). And, the same is the case on the part of the church in Antioch extending their fellowship to the Jerusalem church. Each church continued “**in the doctrine of Christ.**” Thus, they had “**both the Father and the Son**” (2 John 9; Col. 3:17). Neither church was going “**beyond the things that are written**” (1 Cor. 4:6-ASV, 1901). All other things being scripturally equal, there is no other basis on which one church may extend fellowship to another church. If there is, we would like to know what it is.

Question: If it is the case (and it is) that the only grounds by which one church may extend fellowship to another church is that each one must be functioning only on the basis described in the preceding paragraph, what if one church adopts a policy that causes her to go “**beyond the things that are written**”? Does the authority for scriptural fellowship remain? Is it “once in fellowship, always in fellowship” regardless of what in the future either church may come to believe and practice? Answer: No, faithful children of God may not fellowship unfaithful children of God, whether they are organized or not. If that is not the case, then faithful churches of Christ remain in fellowship with the Christian Church, every “anti” church (those teaching doctrines that bind on people what the New Testament does not bind), and liberal churches (those teaching doctrines that loose people from what

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Clinton Hamilton said,

No one familiar with the New Testament will say that the subject of withdrawing from a brother is unimportant. Any mature and serious student readily acknowledges that this subject occupies a prominent position in the remedial scheme.⁴

Guy N. Woods wrote:

Notwithstanding the laxity that presently obtains in local congregations, the exercise of the discipline of heretics and every other kind of sinful conduct is no obscure teaching but clearly and pointedly enjoined in the Scriptures...*

G. C. Brewer said,

If a congregation permits impure individuals to remain unchastened within its fellowship, it thereby becomes partaker of their sin and will soon so far drift out of the favor of the Lord that the candlestick will be removed.⁵

WHAT DOES CHURCH DISCIPLINE MEAN?

Discipline is a word that definitely must be defined because it is particularly out of step in our time. Our permissive, indulgent age is emphasizing no controls, no restraints and no limitations. Discipline is one of the greatest needs of our day.

Church discipline, broadly speaking, includes all the processes or means a church uses in training and educating her members to walk in the light.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The marginal note [ASV, 1901—*CFTF Editor*] on the word “instruction in discipline” (*paideian*): Thayer says, “discipline” means “whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions, hence, an instruction which aims as the increase of virtue.”

Church discipline is two-fold in its nature. *First*, there is instructive discipline, in which the elders and all the members of the church play a vital role. In instructive discipline, elders are to (1) feed the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), (2) be an example to the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3), (3) take the oversight and rule the congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17), and (4) watch in behalf of all.

The church [omitted in book chapter, supplied by *CFTF* editor] is to (1) know the elders (1 The. 5:12); (2) esteem them highly in love for their work’s sake (1 The. 5:13); (3) count them worthy of honor and some of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17); (4) receive no accusation against an elder quickly (1 Tim. 5:19); (5) obey and submit to the elders (Heb. 13:17). Christians must exhort one another daily (Heb. 3:12,13) and provoke unto love and good works (Heb. 10:24,25). *Second*, there is a corrective discipline which is chastising and penalizing in its nature. Specifically and negatively, it involves

“the exclusion of the disorderly from the fellowship of the disciples” (Warren).

WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP DEFINITELY COMMANDED

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:17). **But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person** (1 Cor. 5:13). **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 ... And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed** (2 The. 3:6,14). **Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme** (1 Tim. 1:20). **Perverse disputings of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from such withdraw thyself** (1 Tim. 6:5).

WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP DOES NOT MEAN

First, it does not mean the church is primarily interested in making someone suffer, even though suffering will be involved. A doctor sometimes finds it necessary to give us bitter medicine or to remove a leg or arm, not to make us suffer, but to help us regain our health or save our life. God chastises his children, not just to make us suffer, but that we may be **“exercised thereby”** (Heb. 12:5-11). *Second*, it does not mean vengeance toward the offender. **“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”** (Rom. 12:19). *Third*, it does not mean the church has condemned the individual to hell. Only God has that prerogative. *Fourth*, it does not mean a public announcement before the congregation. Certainly a public announcement will be involved, but fellowship has not been withdrawn if the members continue the same association with the sinful brother—although, it does not mean the one withdrawn from becomes an enemy. **“And yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”** (2 The. 3:15).

WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP MEANS

Withdrawal means “to take back or away; to remove from use; to remove or draw back from; to turn away; to draw away or turn aside; to move back from a place, position, group, or person” (Webster). *First*, it means to avoid or turn away from. **“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them”** (Rom. 16:17). **“Avoid”** means to “withdraw from;” **“Mark them”** means “to eye them closely.”

Do not shut your eyes to what they are doing, nor make excuses for them, nor for any others who cause divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to the gospel, but turn away from them. This means that brethren should have no fellow-

ship with them (Whiteside).

Second, association or company is to be refused.

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators; Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then ye must needs go out of the world. But now have I written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat (1 Cor. 5:9-11).

“Not to keep company” means “not to be mingled up among,” have no interchange of hospitality which would imply brotherly recognition. When Peter told Cornelius that **“it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company** (Greek, *kallao*) **or come unto one of another nation”** (Acts 10:28) he meant “it was unlawful to glue or cement together.” *Third*, no encouragement in any way is to be given to the evil one.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

It is evident that withdrawing fellowship means to “separate from, to retire from both personally and privately, as well as by public announcement, and to turn away from.”

WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP HAS DEFINITE PURPOSES

One purpose of withdrawal is to save the soul of the erring one. Paul told the church at Corinth to deliver the fornicator **“unto Satan that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Cor. 5:4,5). Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander unto Satan **“that they may learn not to blaspheme”** (1 Tim. 1:19, 20). He hoped they would be brought to repentance. The Thessalonians were to have no company or fellowship with the disorderly **“that he may be ashamed”** (2 The. 3:14) and brought to repentance.

A second purpose of withdrawing is to save the souls of the other members of the church. It is only as one sees the true nature of sin that one will shun the appearance of evil. Failure to purge out sin leads to a toleration of sin and blinds one to its true nature (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1,2). **“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”** (1 Cor. 5:6). The church that tolerates the disorderly will not escape condemnation. The false teachers at Pergamos were condemned, but the Lord told the church **“I have a few things against thee”** (Rev. 2:12-16). The Lord commended many things about the church at Thyatira but had a few things against her because she suffered **“that woman Jezebel...to teach and seduce my servants”** (Rev. 2:18-20).

Magnifying and exalting the Lord and the church in the eyes of the world is a third purpose of withdrawing fellow-

ship. Every Christian and every church has the responsibility to be a light in the world (Mat. 5:14-16; Phi. 2:14-16). Every church and every individual has the responsibility to, **“do all to the glory of God”** (1 Cor. 10:31) and to cause men **“to glorify God”** (1 Pet. 2:12). Church discipline, if properly exercised, will increase men’s respect for the church. The discipline exercised upon Ananias and Sapphira brought **“great fear upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things”** (Acts 5:11).

A fourth purpose of withdrawing is to cause each of us to examine our own lives. Paul told Timothy, **“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear”** (1 Tim. 5:20). “If all members of the church were informed as to what they may expect when sin is allowed to rule their lives, very little corrective discipline would be needed” (Joe Shubert).

END NOTES

¹ Thomas Warren, “Church Discipline,” *The Minister’s Monthly*, Vol. VI, No. 11 (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., July, 1961).

² J.W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts*, Vol. 1 (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Co., 1892).

³ Alexander Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. VI, (Nashville Harbinger Book Club, 1835).

⁴ Clinton Hamilton, *Preceptor*, December 1951, p. 3,5.

* Guy N. Woods, No Citation given—*CFTF* Editor.

⁵ G. C. Brewer, *The Model Church*, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1957), p.108.

FROM WHOM IS FELLOWSHIP TO BE WITHDRAWN?

First, broadly speaking, fellowship is to be withdrawn from all that walk disorderly. **“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). W. E. Vine writes:

(a) *ataktos* signifies not keeping order (a negative, *tasso*, to put in order, arrange): it was especially a military term, denoting not keeping rank, insubordinate, members who manifested an insubordinate spirit, whether by excitability or officiousness or idleness. (b) *ataktos* signifies disorderly, with slackness (like soldiers not keeping rank), in 2 The. 3:6; In verse 3:11 it is said of those in the church who refused to work, and became busybodies (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13). (c) *atakteo* signifies to be out of rank, out of one’s place, undisciplined, to behave disorderly: in the military sense, to break rank; negatively in 2 The. 3:7, of the example set by the apostles and fellow-missionaries, in working for their bread while they were at Thessalonica so as not to burden the saints. (Also see **“unruly”**—*CFTF* Editor)

A disorderly person then is any church member that is walking contrary to the truth, i.e., **“not after the tradition which he received of us.”** “Whatever one may be doing that is contrary to the teachings of the apostles is disorderly con-

duct, and therefore sufficient grounds for withdrawal if the guilty brother will not repent” (Woods).

Second, fellowship must be withdrawn from a brother that will not work. Those who will not work are primarily the ones Paul is talking about in 2 Thessalonians 3:

For we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (v. 11,12).

Paul had set the example before them as one that did not walk disorderly in this manner.

For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you (2 The. 3:7,8).

It is obvious that one will not work is “**disorderly.**” Thus Paul commands a congregation to “**note that man;” “have no company with him;” “that he may be ashamed;” “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.**”

Third, fellowship must be withdrawn from those that teach things contrary to sound doctrine.

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

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, he hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed (2 John 9,10).

These verses clearly reveal that such individuals are to be (1) marked and avoided; (2) withdrawn from; and (3) given no encouragement in their false teaching in any way.

Fourth, fellowship is to be withdrawn from fornicators, covetous, extortioners, idolaters, railers, and drunkards. “**But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such as one no not to eat**” (1 Cor. 5:

11). “**Fornication**” (*pornein*) may refer “to every kind of illicit sexual relationship whether married or unmarried people (Lightfoot). “**Covetous**” (*pleonexia*) means one inordinately desirous of something belonging to another. Paul calls covetousness idolatry (Col. 3:5). An “**extortioner**” (*haxpax*) is one that takes away his neighbor’s goods by force, fraud, violence, etc. An “**idolater**” (*eidololatrās*) is one who places an idol between him and his God. A “**railer**” (*loidoros*) is an abusive person who speaks evil of others. He may use abusive words against individuals or his **railing accusations** may be against the whole church.

Fifth, fellowship must be withdrawn from those who wilfully and habitually forsake the assembly. “**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching**” (Heb. 10:25). One that habitually forsakes the assembly is walking “**disorderly**” (2 The. 3:6), or out of order. This sin has become so widespread among brethren that it is considered a little sin. Some churches never withdraw from those who forsake the assembly and others withdraw only from those that do forsake the assembly.

WHAT IS THE SCRIPTURAL PROCEDURE IN WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP?

First, the absolute certainty of the guilt must be ascertained. Under the law of Moses if charges were brought against the inhabitants of a city—such as serving other gods—they were to be slain with the sword. But before this was done the Jews were to (1) inquire, (2) make search, (3) ask diligently, (4) be sure it was true and certain, and (5) that such abomination was actually there (Deu. 13:14). Paul told Timothy to receive no accusation against an elder except “**before two or three witnesses**” (1 Tim. 5:19). Charges against individuals must never be accepted on the basis of hearsay but must be established by concrete evidence.

Second, the disorderly must be warned and vividly impressed about his wrong. “**Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men**” (1 The. 5:14). If your brother sins against you “**rebuke him**” (Lk. 17:3). “**A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself**” (Tit. 3:10,11). The principle of rebuking and warning clearly stands out.

Third, there must be a sincere, diligent effort to restore the disorderly.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1). **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).

If the disorderly refuses to repent, after guilt has definitely been established, warnings have been given, diligent efforts to restoration have been exerted, then fellowship must be withdrawn as the final effort to lead to repentance.

...let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:17). Put away the wicked man from among yourselves (1 Cor. 5:13). I have delivered unto Satan... (1 Tim. 5:20). Have no company with him... (2 The. 3:14).

WHAT IS TO BE OUR ACTION TOWARD AND TREATMENT OF ONE DISFELLOWSHIPED?

First, the whole church must administer and support the action.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:4,5).

Second, he is to be treated as a heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:17). It does not mean we would cease to show any kindness or compassion toward him or that we would refuse him any help. Our Lord showed compassion and kindness toward the heathen. We are still interested in his salvation, but our actions should leave no doubt about our attitude toward his life.

Third, he is to be avoided. **“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them”** (Rom. 16:17). *Ekklineo* is used in Romans 16:17 to mean “turning away from those who cause offenses and occasions of stumbling” (Vine). We must make him keenly conscious of what he has lost by our withdrawal of fellowship and of God’s disapproval of his life.

Fourth, we are to have no company with such a one. **“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”** (2 The. 3:14,15). **“To keep company with harlots”** (Pro. 29:3) meant to enjoy, feed, have delight.

The withholding of fellowship so dear to the hearts of men brings forcefully to the offender’s conscience a sense of guilt which he must feel before he is willing to repent. In view of the fact that our action is for the purpose of bringing the disorderly one to a sense of guilt, we are not to regard him as our enemy but as an erring brother who in an unrepentant state is his own worst enemy!¹

Fifth, we must not engage in a social meal with one from whom fellowship has been withdrawn. **“... with such an one no not to eat”** (1 Cor. 5:11a). To eat with a man, to a Jew was to acknowledge him as one’s equal and worth of one’s company (cf. Acts 11:3). The meal here does not refer to the Lord’s supper because Paul forbids us “keep-

ing company” and “eating” with a brother that is a sinner, but allows us to “keep company” and eat with men of the world, or else we must **“needs go out of the world.”** Surely, Paul is not allowing us to eat the Lord’s supper with a man of the world [while] forbidding it with a brother from whom we have withdrawn fellowship.

Sixth, we are to stand ready to receive such a one back into complete fellowship when he repents.

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

When one repents and turns from his wrong then we can know that God has forgiven him and we must do the same (Luke 17:3; Acts 8:22).

Seventh, other congregations must refuse fellowship. Every congregation needs to remember that corrective discipline is practiced because it is the only hope left of bringing the sinful brother to repentance. Therefore, another congregation must not do anything that would encourage and harden the disfellowshipped brother in his sinful way. Furthermore, the receiving of such a one would be assuming authority over a sister congregation and reversing the decision of the church that excluded him.

Corrective discipline is never a pleasant task. Reluctance to withdraw from a brother does not necessarily indicate an unwillingness to obey God, but may rather indicate our great love for a brother and a desire to be sure we have exhausted all means to his restoration. No church should rush eagerly into withdrawal. But when every means short of withdrawal have failed to restore the brother, then a reluctance to withdraw would not only indicate a lack of love for the brother but an unwillingness to obey God.

End Note

¹ Clinton D. Hamilton, *Preceptor*, Dec., 1951, p. 3.

—Deceased

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

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 6, 7).

USING THE GOSPEL BROOM

Roelf L. Ruffner

Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:18-25 *NKJV*).

INTRODUCTION:

1. James, half-brother of our Lord, is writing to remind us and his readers of their need to completely overcome temptation and complete their journey to heaven. **“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him”** (Jam. 1:12).
2. The early Christian faced a hostile world: worldliness was rampant, governmental corruption, immorality, idolatry, false religion, ancient Judaism, false doctrine (1 John 2:16-17).
3. We also face a world gone mad by sin. Sensuality and immorality pervade almost every corner of society. Temptation on every side: media, internet, friends, coworkers, etc.
4. As a 21st Century Christian, how may I keep myself from sin (1 John 1:10)?
 - 1) The key is “His word is not in us.”
 - 2) I must not be a hermit (Mat. 5:14).
5. Old time gospel preachers often had sermons titled: *Using the Gospel Broom*.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16-17).

1). **“Power”** translates the Greek word *dyunamus* from which we get our English word *dynamite*.

6. Brethren, is there persistent sin in our lives? **“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** (Rom. 6:1-2).

I. I BEGIN BY UNDERSTANDING WHO I AM—“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures” (Jam. 1:18)

1. Salvation did not come to us arbitrarily or by chance.
 - 1) God proposed it (Eph. 1:4).
 - a. Not chosen individually but as a group—the church.
 - 2) God made this possible through the gospel and His providence (1 Tim. 2:4; Eph. 2:8).
2. The Christian has been **“brought forth”** through the gospel or **“the word of truth”** (Jam. 1:18; John 3:5; 1 Pet 1:23; 1

Cor. 4:15).

1) Past sin was cleansed by the blood of Christ and the promises of God—at baptism (Rom. 6:6).

3. We are now the **“first fruits of His creatures.”**

1) **“first fruits”**—the wave offering of the sheaf of grain from the first harvest.

2) The first to obey the truth of God’s word—the gospel (Rom. 8:21-22).

4. Too many Christians are overcome by the world and temptation.

II. SWEEP AWAY THE OLD SINS

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (Jam. 1:19-21).

1. Often the old man of sin clings to me (Heb. 12:1).

2. How to avoid this? Practice self-control.

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jam. 1:19).

1) **“So then”**—in view of who I am as a Christian (Gen. 4:6-7).

2) A universal truth—an uncontrolled Christian does not glorify God—**“for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God”** (Jam. 1:20; Also see Psa. 37:8; Pro. 25:28).

3. I should sweep sin out of my life. How? **“Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls”** (Jam. 1:21).

1) Develop a deep abhorrence of sin in any form.

a. **“lay aside”** (*KJV*), **“putting away”** (*ASV*, 1901)—as one removes clothing; the act of stripping oneself completely of evil thoughts; something I can only do myself.

b. **“filthiness”**—sins of the flesh.

c. **“wickedness”** or **“naughtiness”** (*KJV*)—sins of the heart.

d. These words describe how loathsome sin is: it pollutes the soul and renders it unclean (Hab. 1:13).

2) Receive or accept the Word of God with meekness.

a. The seed bed for the Bible is the human heart (Luke 8:11, 15).

b. It must be sincerely received (Mat. 13:23).

c. This body of truth can help save my soul—**“save”**: to keep safe, to preserve (Psa. 119:101).

d. It can save me from the **“filthiness”** and wickedness of this world.

4. Do I profit from the Bible or do I allow my heart to become a roadway to the world with no room for the Scriptures (Luke 8:14)?

III. SEEING MYSELF AS GOD DOES.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was (Jam. 1:22-24).

1. The secret of sweeping sin from my life is to continue to sweep.
2. It is not sufficient to just hear and receive the word, I must also be obedient to it (John 14:15).
 - 1) “**doer**”—from the Greek word *poietai*; where we get the English word *poet*.
 - 2) The Christian’s life is a perpetual poem, a harmonious life.
3. It is important that I be a user of the word and not just an audience (Luke 6:46; Mat. 7:26).
4. Self-Delusion: Thinking I can be a hearer and not a doer.
 - 1) Reading about keeping oneself holy but not doing it.
 - 2) Hearing about the need to love my neighbor but not seeking to teach them the truth (1 John 2:4).
5. The word of God allows me to see myself as God does—like a mirror—“**for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was**” (Jam. 1:24)
 - 1) One of the great dangers in Bible study or hearing sermons/classes is lack of application or forgetfulness.

- a. Like a glance into a mirror.
6. If I delve deeply into the Scriptures, I will be blessed.
“**But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does**” (Jam. 1:25).
 - 1) He “**looks**” into God’s mirror and continues to look (continuous action) intently.
 - 2) “**the perfect law of liberty**”—the New Testament.
 - a. “**law**”—a rule of action.
 - b. Law and grace are not mutually exclusive. “**For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death**” (Rom. 8:2).
 - 3) Law and liberty are not contradictory.
 - a. True liberty or freedom is found in doing God’s will.
7. Only the liberty I find in obedience to the gospel can sweep sin out of my life and continue to do so (Tit. 2:11-13)

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God binds on them). That is the case because at one time in the past we were all of one belief and practice regarding obligatory matters. However, if, as some teach, it is a sin for one church to withdraw fellowship from a sister congregation, then, according to their own logic, every church of Christ that is not in fellowship with the Christian Church, every “anti” faction, and all liberal churches of Christ ought to be in fellowship with each other.

As surely as one member of the church can be overtaken in a fault and, thus, in need of being restored to faithfulness to God, then a church (a collection of individual children of God) can be overtaken in a fault and in need of being restored to God. Further, when children of God have the fellowship of a congregation scripturally withdrawn from them and are received into the fellowship

of a sister congregation, said receiving congregation is no longer “**walking in the light**” of gospel truth and is guilty of fellowshiping that which God does not fellowship (Col. 3:17).

There is no use advocating a doctrine, but then ignore and reject the implications (consequences) of it. Such is implied by those who teach that once fellowship is extended from one church to another both are forever in fellowship with God and each other regardless of what either one in the future comes to believe and practice. Whether one believes and teaches error, or believes the truth but practices error, the result is the same—sin is committed on the part of those who do the same.

—David P. Brown, Editor