

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Limitations Regarding Fellowship Part One

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Throughout this study entitled "Our Life Together", the focus has been on ways we can ENHANCE and ENRICH the fellowship that we have together as believers in Jesus Christ.
 - A. Hopefully, we have ALL been challenged to think about our fellowship together as a FAMILY of believers, ESPECIALLY when it comes to doing everything we can to NURTURE that fellowship.
 1. However, in THIS lesson we want to take a slightly different look at fellowship, and specifically address the fact that there are ALSO LIMITATIONS REGARDING FELLOWSHIP.
 - B. Fellowship – which is defined as our common union or our association together as family – is made possible ONLY through the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.
 1. There are two important passages I want us to read together that detail what our fellowship with Jesus Christ has done for us.
 - a. One of these passages is in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus and the other to the church at Colosse.

2. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he wanted those GENTILE Christians to understand that they were just as important and loved by God and by Jesus Christ as their JEWISH brethren who had been baptized into Christ. He wanted them to understand we were all family TOGETHER in Jesus Christ
 - a. Paul affirmed this great truth by showing how the Lord has brought both Jew and Gentile TOGETHER in the Lord's church – the body of Christ – and that as far as the Lord was concerned, they were all ONE in Christ.
 - b. **Ephesians 2:14-22** – *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles*

and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

3. In his letter to Gentile Christians in the church at Colosse, the apostle Paul conveyed the SAME message, only in different words.
 - a. **Colossians 1:21-23** – *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.*
- C. These two passages teach some very important truths about our fellowship together, and how it is all made possible
 1. First, Paul affirms in the letter to the church at Ephesus that Jesus died that He might reconcile us back to God "*in ONE BODY*"
(Ephesians 2:16)

2. Because we have been reconciled back to God in one body, we are now *"FELLOW-CITIZENS with the saints and MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD [or family] of God"* (**Ephesians 2:19**)
 3. We have also been *"joined together"* as A HOLY TEMPLE in the Lord (**Ephesians 2:21**)
 4. And because we have been redeemed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and have been reconciled back to God, we are now *"HOLY, and BLAMELESS, and ABOVE REPROACH in His sight"* (**Colossians 1:22**)
 5. However, all this is conditional upon our continued faithfulness to the Lord, or as Paul put it: *"IF indeed you CONTINUE in the faith, GROUNDED and STEADFAST, and are NOT MOVED AWAY from the hope of the gospel which you heard"* (**Colossians 1:23**)
- D. But what happens if some brother or sister deliberately chooses to NOT continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast; and what happens if they ARE moved away from the hope of the gospel?
1. What are our responsibilities to THEM and to the LOCAL FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS we call the LOCAL CHURCH?
- II. To answer these questions we need to address an UNPLEASANT ASPECT of fellowship – which means occasionally WITHHOLDING fellowship as a means of LOVING DISCIPLINE.

- A. This unpleasant truth is taught THROUGHOUT the scriptures, ESPECIALLY in the teachings of Jesus and the inspired apostles.
1. While fellowship among brethren is wonderful, sometimes we are called upon to withhold our fellowship from a brother or sister in Christ. The scriptures teach:
 - a. We may have to view a brother or sister in Christ as "*a heathen and a tax collector*" (**Matthew 18:17**)
 - b. We may have to "*avoid them*" (**Romans 16:17**)
 - c. We might have to "*put away*" from among ourselves "*that wicked person*" (**1 Corinthians 5:13**)
 - d. We might have to "*withdraw*" ourselves from them, and "*not keep company*" with an unrepentant brother or sister in Christ (**2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14**)
 - e. We might not even be able to "*receive him*" into our house "*nor greet him*" (**2 John 10**)
 2. Therefore, in this study we want to see WHEN AND WHERE discipline is to be exercised within the family of God.
 3. And then, in our NEXT lesson we'll take a close look at an even MORE important aspect of discipline, and learn HOW and WHY discipline is to be exercised among us as believers in Jesus Christ.
 3. So, let's begin by taking a close look at what the Lord Himself had to say about withdrawing fellowship from a fellow believer, and

then see WHEN this form of discipline was used in the New Testament church.

BODY:

- I. Some find it strange that Jesus actually taught the need to exercise this extreme form of discipline among His followers.
 - A. And yet, His teaching on the subject in **Matthew chapter 18** was NOT ONLY clear and concise, the Lord ALSO described the procedure He wanted His disciples to follow when exercising this form of discipline.
 1. **Matthew 18:15-17** – *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 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.' 17 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."*
 2. When Jesus said, *"...let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector"* the Lord was speaking in the context of social relations at the time.
 - a. In the days of Jesus, faithful Jews typically avoided social contact with Gentiles.

- (1). They never invited Gentiles to share a meal or to engage in other social activities simply because they viewed Gentiles as heathen – as unrighteous unbelievers.
 - b. Furthermore, in the days of Jesus, faithful Jews regarded their Jewish brethren who worked for the Roman government as tax collectors as the lowest form of sinner.
 - (1). Tax collectors were not only working for Gentiles (unrighteous unbelievers), they were often guilty of extortion and outright theft – charging their Jewish brethren unfair taxes, and then pocketing the difference for themselves.
 3. These were the kinds of people faithful Jews would AVOID, and with whom they would NEVER have ANY form of SOCIAL CONTACT.
 4. Therefore, Jesus used these two classes of people to ILLUSTRATE the fact that there may come a time when fellowship may need to be WITHHELD from a fellow disciple who refuses to repent of sin – when all social contact ceases.
- B. However, notice that the Lord clearly identifies the specific CIRCUMSTANCES when this form of discipline should be exercised.

1. First, Jesus made it clear that He was talking about some act of ONE BROTHER against ANOTHER that is CLEARLY SIN –
"Moreover if your brother SINS against you..." (Matthew 18:15)
 - a. This is not speaking about something someone says or does to hurt your FEELINGS, or OFFEND you in some way.
 - b. And this is certainly not something we PERCEIVE as sin, when in fact, it may NOT be a sin but simply a matter of disagreement over matters of liberty – such as those we talked about in **Romans chapter 14**.
 - c. It must be something that is CLEARLY and CONCISELY identified in scripture as a SIN – such as those sins mentioned by Paul in **Galatians chapter 5** as *"works of the flesh."*
 2. And second, it must be a sin against YOU – not against a friend, or family member, or against another brother in Christ – but against YOU.
- C. When some brother has sinned against you, notice the PROCEDURE the Lord outlined. We'll take a quick look at the procedure now, and expand on this in our next lesson.
1. The very first step is to *"go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (v. 15)*.

- a. *"If he hears you, you have gained your brother,"* meaning, we have regained a friend and brother in Christ – peace and unity have been restored.
 2. *"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'"*
(v. 16)
 3. *"And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church" (v. 17)*
 4. Finally, Jesus said, *"But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (v. 17)*
 - a. As we said earlier, the implication here is that all further social contact and association with the unrepentant brother needs to be ended – or severed.
- II. The matter of discipline among members of the Lord's people was not only taught by the Lord Himself on this occasion, but was further taught by the inspired APOSTLES of Jesus Christ in their writings to the New Testament church.
- A. **Romans 16:17-18** – *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.*

1. Paul made it clear that he is speaking of those who *"cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned"*
 - a. *"Divisions"* refers to creating disunity and dissension among believers – which can be accomplished by trying to push our own agenda or forcing our will in matters of liberty over others, or, as in this case, by introducing doctrine that is contrary to what is taught in scripture.
 - b. *"Offenses"* is a word that pertains to a bent sapling used as a snare to catch unsuspecting prey – and in this case, is used metaphorically to speak of any person or any thing by which someone who is unlearned or weak in the faith is "entrapped" or drawn into error or sin, such as teaching false doctrine that sounds appealing to the unlearned or untaught.
2. In those cases, Paul said brethren were to *"NOTE"* and *"AVOID THEM."*
 - a. To *"note"* them (or *"mark"* them – KJV) literally means to "keep an eye on them from a distance" – not IGNORE them, but WATCH them so that you can IMMEDIATELY step in and CONFRONT them when you see them causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine.

- b. And to "avoid" them literally means "to turn away from, keep away from" – which is another way of saying avoid all further SOCIAL CONTACT with that person.
 - 3. And the REASON for taking this action is because they are self-serving sinners whose ultimate aim is to use every smooth-sounding argument to "deceive the hearts of the simple," and entice the gullible into sin.
 - a. THAT'S why you need to keep an eye on them, and why everyone needs to stay away from them.
- B. **1 Corinthians 5:1-13** – *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! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 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. 8 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. 9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 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. 11 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. 12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

1. This matter involved a man who was clearly having illicit sexual relations with his father's wife – whom most commentators believe was his step-mother.
 - a. Paul made it clear that this offense was so APPALLING that it was even considered wrong and sinful in the heathen Gentile world.

- b. But sadly, those within the church at Corinth were not only permitting this man to continue in his sin, some were actually coming to his defense.
2. Therefore, the church at Corinth was instructed to do several things – all of which were different ways of saying the same thing.
 - a. First, they were instructed to *"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" (v. 5)*
 - (1). This means to turn him back to the world from which he came (a world under the power and influence of Satan).
 - b. They were to *"purge out the old leaven" (v. 7)*
 - (1). In this case leaven is being used metaphorically for sin, which needs to be removed before it spreads through the entire congregation.
 - c. They were *"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" (v. 11)*
 - d. And finally, to drive the point home, Paul said they were to *"put away from yourselves that wicked person" (v. 13)*
 - (1). In other words, they were to cut off ALL SOCIAL CONTACT with anyone who is a brother or sister in

Christ who persists in openly practicing such serious sins of the flesh.

- (2). The issue here was not over interpretation of scripture or differences over what some saw as matters of liberty, but over the practice of explicit and grossly immoral sins – in THOSE cases all social contact is to be severed.

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

1. The problem facing the church in Thessalonica was the fact that some within the congregation were not working to financially support themselves.
 - a. **2 Thessalonians 3:10-11** – *For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*
2. Although we can't say for certain why some at Thessalonica were not working, most commentators believe the problem some may have been that some misunderstood Paul's comments in his first letter to the church there where he talked about the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.

- a. Apparently some thought Paul meant that the Lord would be coming back SOON, and therefore felt there was no need to work to provide for themselves or their families.
3. Their idleness had led them to commit two sins:
 - a. First, their idleness had led them to become PANHANDLERS, in effect, depending on others to feed them.
 - (1). They were masking their own laziness in the cloak of religious piety – appearing outwardly to be patiently waiting for the Lord’s return, when in effect they were using that as an excuse for not putting in a days labor for a days wage to feed themselves and their families.
 - b. And second, their idleness had ALSO led them to become "BUSYBODIES," which, according to the original Greek word pertains to someone who becomes preoccupied with other people’s personal matters, and busies themselves in other people’s business.
 - (1). Also defined as a meddler, a nuisance, a pest, or an annoying person who is always sticking their nose in other people’s business.
4. Therefore, Paul said, *"Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow*

weariness in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed." (2 Thessalonians 3:12-14)

- a. The phrase in **verse 14**, "*note that person and do not keep company with him,*" is similar to what Paul wrote in **Romans 16:17** – "*note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.*"
- b. To "*note*" them literally means to "keep an eye on them from a distance." And to "*avoid*" them literally means "to turn away from, keep away from" – which is another way of saying avoid all further social contact with that person.

D. **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. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*

1. The apostle John was dealing with a serious problem rising in the Lord's church toward the close of the first century – namely, a perversion of the basic teachings of the doctrine of Christ.
 - a. Some were beginning to preach that Jesus never actually came in the flesh (which is a basic tenant of Gnosticism).

2. Time doesn't permit us to go into detail about the rise of Gnosticism in the church, or the many ways it completely perverts the gospel of Christ.
 - a. But it was ONE OF the biggest INTERNAL threat facing the church of the FIRST FOUR CENTURIES, and was responsible for leading countless numbers into doctrinal error and sin.

3. Therefore, the apostle John made it crystal clear that faithful Christians were NOT to extend ANY form of hospitality to those who were going around preaching this grossly perverted gospel, and not to even GREET them – being happy to see them, and greeting them with a blessing, such as "God's speed," or "God be with you."
 - a. To do so would actually give the false teacher encouragement and a form of moral support, and would make the gullible Christian who extended them hospitality a partaker in the false teacher's evil deeds.
 - b. Therefore, *"do NOT receive him into your house NOR greet him."*
 - c. Have NOTHING to do with them.

CONCLUSION:

- I. I think we can see from the passages we have just studied that the Bible does, indeed, teach that there are some RESTRICTIONS REGARDING FELLOWSHIP.
 - A. And the reasons for this are quite obvious.
 1. We must do everything within our power to keep sin OUT of the local church.
 2. AND we must keep those who may be weak in the faith, or who may be spiritually immature, from being FURTHER WEAKENED by the ungodly influence of a sinning brother or sister in Christ.
 3. We'll talk more about the PURPOSE of discipline in the body of Christ and how it's to be properly done in our next lesson.
 - B. But for now let me conclude with this thought.
 1. While it's certainly true that the Lord wants us to keep the church pure and remove those who persist in sin, it's also true that we may not always know about sin in the lives of others.
 2. But the Lord does – He sees EVERY SIN in EVERY LIFE.
 3. And the day is coming when the LORD will remove those who have been persistent in sin and who have been unrepentant, and will NOT ONLY keep them from entering heaven, but will cast them into eternal punishment.

4. In the parable of the Wheat and Tares, Jesus taught that the day is coming when: *"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, 42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."* **(Matthew 13:41-42)**
 - a. We may be harboring sin in our lives that is completely undetected by our brothers and sisters in Christ, but it is certainly NOT hidden from the Lord.
 - b. Therefore, we need to do all we can to make certain we are ready for the day when the Lord brings about this terrible judgment against the unrighteous.
5. There are only two ways we can be prepared:
 - a. One, by making sure we have come to the Lord in complete faithful obedience, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins.
 - b. The OTHER, is by making sure we are living our lives in keeping with His will, and if not, IMMEDIATELY repenting of any and all sins, and confessing them to the Lord.
6. If YOU need to do either one of these things this morning to prepare YOURSELF for the Day of Judgment, we urge you to do it NOW as we stand and sing this song of encouragement.