

# OUR LIFE TOGETHER

## Limitations Regarding Fellowship Part Two

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. For the past several weeks we've been looking closely at biblical fellowship in a study we've entitled "OUR LIFE TOGETHER."
  - A. The PRIMARY FOCUS of this study has been to help us better understand what true biblical fellowship is, and the many ways we can ENHANCE and ENRICH that fellowship.
    1. One thing we've stressed throughout this study is that we must ALWAYS think of ourselves as a FAMILY of believers.
      - a. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ.
      - b. And because we are FAMILY, we need to HELP and ENCOURAGE one another, EDIFY one another, ADMONISH one another, and NURTURE one another.
    2. However, in our LAST lesson we began looking at biblical fellowship from a slightly DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE – namely that there are also LIMITATIONS REGARDING FELLOWSHIP.

- B. As we introduced the subject of LIMITATIONS REGARDING FELLOWSHIP, we mentioned that our fellowship with one another as brothers and sisters, and with God as our Father in heaven, is ONLY made possible through the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.
1. We looked at two passages written by the apostle Paul that reveal some important truths about our fellowship with Jesus Christ.
    - a. First, Paul tells us that Jesus died that He might reconcile us back to God *"in ONE BODY"* **(Ephesians 2:16)**
    - b. 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)**
    - c. We have also been *"joined together"* as A HOLY TEMPLE in the Lord **(Ephesians 2:21)**
    - d. And, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and the shedding of His blood, we are now *"HOLY, and BLAMELESS, and ABOVE REPROACH in His sight"* **(Colossians 1:22)**

2. However, we said 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**)

B. Then we asked the question: What happens if a brother or sister in Christ deliberately chooses to **NOT** continue in the faith; and what happens if they **ARE** moved away from the hope of the gospel?

1. In those situations we learned that we may have to occasionally **WITHHOLD** fellowship as a means of **LOVING DISCIPLINE**. In fact, the Bible teaches that:

- 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**)

- C. Since this is SUCH an important subject, it's IMPERATIVE that we learn all we can about **HOW** this form of discipline is to be exercised and **WHY** it's occasionally necessary to WITHDRAWN ALL SOCIAL CONTACT from a sinning brother or sister in Christ.
1. If it's done PROPERLY, there is a VERY GOOD CHANCE that a soul can be SAVED from sin.
  2. However, if it's done IMPROPERLY, we may **not only** lose a brother or sister PERMANENTLY to the world, WE may ALSO be held accountable by the Lord Himself for failing to follow the divinely inspired guidelines found in Scripture.

**BODY:**

- I. So, let's begin by asking: HOW do we exercise discipline among ourselves as brothers and sisters in Christ, and WHY – what purpose does it serve?
  - A. Last week we took a brief look at something the Lord said on this subject found in **Matthew chapter 18**. Let's look at the passage again:
    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."*

- B. When it comes to dealing with a brother who has CLEARLY SINNED against US, there are FOUR STEPS we must follow.
1. Jesus said the FIRST STEP is to *"go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (v. 15)*.
    - a. Notice, it is the one who has been SINNED AGAINST that has the responsibility here – YOU are the one who needs to go speak to the brother or sister who sinned against YOU, not the other way around.
    - b. But ALSO notice that the matter MUST BE kept *"between you and him alone"* – it is NOT to be shared with ANYONE ELSE under ANY circumstances WHATSOEVER!
    - c. And the reason for this should be obvious. It gives both parties an opportunity to DISCUSS the matter privately and RESOLVE it privately so that the reputation and integrity of the SINNING BROTHER can be preserved.
    - d. If we make this issue PUBLIC at this point, OR if we TELL OTHERS about the sin, we may DAMAGE or perhaps even DISTROY the reputation and integrity of the sinning brother BEFORE he even has a chance to repent.

(1). When we do THAT, we have actually sinned against HIM!

WE are actually SPEAKING EVIL of a brother before he had been given a chance to repent of his sin – even though we may try to cleverly disguise it as seeking advice from another trusted brother or sister in Christ.

- e. **Leveticus 19:16-18** – *You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. 17 You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*
- f. So, it's OUR RESPONSIBILITY to PRIVATELY confront our brother, WITHOUT bearing any grudge, and do all we can do to RESOLVE the matter then and there PRIVATELY.
- g. Jesus said, *"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. However, Jesus went on to say, *"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)*
  - a. **Deuteronomy 19:15** – *"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established."*
  - b. The idea being expressed in these passages is to take one or two IMPARTIAL witnesses – or DISINTERESTED THIRD PARTIES – who can reason with the sinning brother without him feeling he's being "ganged" upon.
  - c. But again, the implication here is that the matter is to remain EXCLUSIVELY BETWEEN the one or two others until ample time has been given for the sinning brother to see his wrong and repent of it.
3. Then Jesus said, *"And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church" – (v. 17)*
  - a. After every effort up to this point has failed to resolve the matter, then and ONLY THEN should it be brought before the church, or the assembly.

- b. Those IMPARTIAL witnesses who NOW have FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE of the offense are to VALIDATE the truthfulness of the charges against the sinning brother.
  - (1). But ONLY because they now have FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE.
  - (2). They aren't repeating a RUMOR or passing on SECOND or THIRD-HAND information.
  - (3). They've heard the FACTS from the LIPS OF THE SINNER HIMSELF.
- c. But once again, the PURPOSE for bringing this matter before the assembly is to allow each and every member of the congregation to become involved and to lovingly approach the sinning brother in an effort to lead him to genuine repentance.
- 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 in our lesson last week, the implication here is that ALL FURTHER SOCIAL CONTACT AND ASSOCIATION with the unrepentant brother needs to be ended – or severed.
- 5. These FOUR STEPS address HOW we are to discipline.

II. However, I want you to notice something that is IMPLIED in this procedure at EACH AND EVERY STEP – and this will help answer the question as to WHY withdrawing fellowship is occasionally necessary.

A. Why do you suppose Jesus said *"go and tell him his fault between you and him alone"*? **(v. 15)**

1. Simply because the OBJECTIVE is to resolve the issue and GAIN our brother – to restore FRIENDSHIP and to preserve PEACE and UNITY within the body of Christ.
  - a. The objective is NOT to disgrace our brother, but to lovingly confront him in an effort to GAIN our brother.
2. And throughout the REMAINING steps of this procedure, the SAME objective is IMPLIED in every step.
  - a. When we take one or two more with us, so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established, the objective is ONCE AGAIN to GAIN our brother – to give these impartial witnesses an opportunity to reason with our brother and lead him to repentance.
  - b. When the matter is then brought before the church, the objective is ALSO to GAIN our brother by giving the entire congregation an opportunity to lovingly confront this brother and encourage him to repent of his sin.

- c. And even when all further social contact with withdrawn, the OBJECTIVE is STILL to gain our brother by causing him to feel the sadness of LOSING the continued fellowship of loving brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - d. That's WHY discipline of this kind may occasionally be necessary – to ULTIMATELY GAIN OUR BROTHER.
3. How do we know this? Well... let's look at a few OTHER passages where the subject of withdrawing fellowship is discussed.
- B. In **1 Corinthians chapter 5**, the apostle Paul found it necessary to command the church to withdraw from a brother who was openly committing adultery and fornication.
1. **1 Corinthians 5:1-5** – *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, I 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.*

- a. **1 Corinthians 5:13**, Paul summed it up by saying, *Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."*
2. This matter had ALREADY reached the level where the ENTIRE CHURCH was aware of the sin.
3. But notice WHY it was necessary to WITHDRAW from this sinning brother.
  - a. Paul instructed the church 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). To *"deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh"* means to turn him back to the world from which he came (a world under the power and influence of Satan).
    - (2). But the REASON for doing this is that he may eventually come to his senses, and that *"his spirit may be saved"* in the day when the Lord comes to judge the world.
4. In fact, we could say the reason why discipline was necessary in THIS case was really TWO-FOLD.
  - a. The FIRST reason was to SAVE THE CHURCH.

- (1). The church needed to withdraw from this brother to keep others within the church from being weakened by his influence.
  - (2). Paul wanted everyone to understand that sin cannot be merely overlooked in the body of Christ. We must confront it and, if necessary, remove it.
  - (3). Otherwise, if sin is not dealt with, it will eventually permeate the entire church and souls will be lost.
  - (4). Therefore, the first objective was to save the church.
- b. And the SECOND reason was to SAVE THE SINNER.
- (1). That's why Paul said, "*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)*
  - (2). Paul was JUST AS concerned for the spiritual welfare of this sinning BROTHER as he was about the spiritual welfare of the CHURCH.
  - (3). Withdrawing fellowship was the ONLY WAY he would feel the LOSS and EMPTINESS of no longer enjoying close, intimate social contact with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

(4). Hopefully, that LOSS and EMPTINESS will lead him to  
REPENT and be FULLY RESTORED.

C. In **2 Thessalonians chapter 3** the apostle Paul dealt with another situation where the church needed to withdraw fellowship.

1. The problem was that some apparently misunderstood Paul's teaching about the second coming of Christ, and were thinking the Lord would return SOON – within the next few WEEKS or perhaps MONTHS.

a. Therefore, SOME in the church at Thessalonica decided to quit their jobs and merely wait for the Lord's return.

b. But their IDLENESS led them to commit TWO SINS:

(1). First, their idleness led them to become, in effect, PANHANDLERS – depending on others to feed them.

(2). 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.

2. **2 Thessalonians 3:6-7** – Paul said, *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.

- a. Paul concludes: *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. (v. 14)*
  - b. This is another way of saying that all further social contact with that person must cease.
3. But notice! Paul explained WHY this separation from all further social contact is necessary; namely, *"that he may be ashamed."* **(v. 14)**
- a. The word *"ashamed"* does NOT imply that WE bring shame upon him, but rather that he shames HIMSELF.
  - b. The word *"ashamed"* in the original Greek carries the idea of looking at ONESELF, or of turning ones thoughts to ONESELF for the purpose of seeing ourselves for what we REALLY are.
4. Therefore, Paul's ULTIMATE GOAL was to bring those who were sinning BACK into fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ by forcing them to see themselves for what they really were.
- a. But to do that, the brethren at Thessalonica needed to FIRST take the drastic action of refusing to FEED those who were not

working, and SECOND they needed to break off all further SOCIAL CONTACT with them.

- b. Hopefully, this would cause those lazy busybodies to see that they really ARE indolent, slothful, apathetic busybodies who are using a cloak of religious piety to bully their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ into feeding them and taking care of their needs.
- c. In seeing THEMSELVES as they really are, HOPEFULLY they will be moved to feel ASHAMED and repent of their sins and be restored into fellowship once again.

5. If that happened, it would be an excellent example of GODLY SORROW producing REPENTANCE.

- a. **2 Corinthians 7:10** – *For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*

6. Therefore, the REASON for withdrawing fellowship was two-fold: to SAVE THE CHURCH from the influence of the sinner, and to SAVE THE SINNER by forcing them to see themselves for who and what they are, so they will be ashamed and repent.

III. Now, the BIG question is this: How can we make this kind of discipline most effective? There are actually THREE GUIDELINES found in two of the passages we just examined.

A. The FIRST guideline is *"do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* **(2 Thessalonians 3:15)**

1. Immediately after saying to the church at Thessalonica, *"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"* (v. 14), Paul added, *"Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* (v. 15)
2. The words, *"do not count him as an enemy"* (*"do not regard him as an enemy"* – NIV) means we are not to think of this person as an ADVERSARY, and to not act HOSTILE toward him, or be EMBITTERED against him, or be HATEFUL toward him.
  - a. In other words, withdrawing from such a brother is to be done in the COMPLETE ABSENCE of ANY FORM of hostility, bitterness or hatred.
  - b. NONE WHATSOEVER!!
3. Rather, we are to *"admonish him"* – meaning, we are to WARN him and CAUTION him of the consequences of his sin (not THREATEN, or BULLY or INTIMIDATE him).

4. And, we are to "*admonish him as a brother*" – we are still brothers in Christ because Jesus made us that way by shedding His blood for BOTH of us.
- B. The SECOND guideline is that discipline must clearly be exercised by the MAJORITY within the local church. **(2 Corinthians 2:6)**
1. If you remember back in **1 Corinthians chapter 5**, the apostle Paul commanded the church to withdraw from the brother who was sinning with his father's wife.
    - a. Between the time when Paul wrote THAT letter to the church at Corinth and the time when he wrote **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians**, that brother repented of his sin.
  2. **2 Corinthians 2:6** – Paul NOW says, *This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man...*
    - a. It's hard to imagine why SOME wanted to MAINTAIN social contact with this brother – especially since his sin was so OUTRAGEOUS. So not everyone in the church at Corinth withdrew from this brother.
    - b. Fortunately, the MAJORITY of the members of the church DID obey Paul's command.
  3. If this action had NOT been taken by the majority of the members of the Corinthian church, this man might NOT have repented.

- a. If the MAJORITY had CONTINUED social contact with this bother, he would have never experienced the pain of losing the close relationship he had with his brothers and sisters in the past.
4. Fortunately, the majority DID withdraw from him and the result was that he felt such shame and guilt for what he had done that Paul actually says this brother was NOW in danger of being "*swallowed up with too much sorrow.*" **(2 Corinthians 2:7)**
- C. And finally, when a sinning brother or sister has repented of their sin, we are to FORGIVE and COMFORT them, and REAFFIRM our love toward them. **(2 Corinthians 2:6-8)**
1. **2 Corinthians 2:6-8** – *This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.*
  2. The three KEY WORDS here are: FORGIVE, COMFORT and REAFFIRM.
    - a. The word FORGIVE means to FREE or PARDON someone of an offense – to free ourselves of the MEMORY of that offense

(by never recalling it again to our memory), and thereby to free them of the GUILT and SORROW of that offense.

b. The word COMFORT literally means to come to ones side – to come to them to extend COMFORT, CONSOLATION and REASSURANCE.

c. And to REAFFIRM our love means to PUBLICLY CONFIRM that our love for this person has NOT DIMINISHED in the LEAST.

3. But notice that Paul adds one more reason why this man should be forgiven, comforted and reassured of their love.

a. Not only was there a risk that he may be *"swallowed up with too much sorrow,"* but Paul adds this warning in **verse 11**: *"lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices."*

b. Failing to FORGIVE, COMFORT and REAFFIRM their love toward this man would open the door for Satan to enter the hearts of those who are UNFORGIVING and FEED on their bitterness and resentment.

c. Nothing will destroy fellowship and devastate a local church ANY FASTER than bitterness, resentment and an unforgiving attitude.

- d. Therefore, in the end, Paul urged the saints at Corinth to TOTALLY and COMPLETELY FORGIVE and RESTORE this repentant brother – otherwise Satan will wreck HAVOC and completely DEVASTATE that church.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. I think it's safe to say that NONE of us would EVER want to go through an experience like this – either as a church, and ESPECIALLY as the one from whom the church is withdrawing fellowship.
  - A. However, to maintain OUR LIFE TOGETHER as brothers and sisters in Christ we OCCASIONALLY need to OPENLY confront sin.
    1. We do this for TWO reasons.
      - a. To SAVE THE CHURCH – to keep sin from spreading within the local body like a cancer until it destroys and kills the body.
      - b. To SAVE THE SINNER – to lovingly confront a brother or sister in Christ in an effort to GAIN them back into the fellowship, to SAVE them from the day when Jesus returns to judge the world by helping them to see themselves as they really are so that they may be ASHAMED of the sin in their life and repent.

2. It's relatively EASY to obey those POSITIVE commands about the way we are to conduct our lives, but it's NOT SO EASY to obey those HARD and NEGATIVE commands.
    - a. Perhaps this is why Paul told the Corinthians, concerning the need to withdraw from a sinning brother: *For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. (2 Corinthians 2:9)*
    - b. Withdrawing fellowship is NOT a pleasant thing to do, but sometimes it is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY if we want to be obedient in ALL things.
    - c. And FORGIVING, COMFORTING and REAFFIRMING our love to a repentant brother or sister is not always easy. We may have to overcome our OWN hurt, anger and bitterness. But it is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY if we are going to be obedient in ALL things.
- B. As you look at your life, are YOU obedient in all things?
1. Are you trying to the very best of your ability to be obedient to the Lord and faithfully serve Him each and every day of your life?
  2. Since NONE of us live our lives perfect or sinless every day, let me ask the question this way:

- a. Have you come to Christ in faith, having repented of your past sins, and having been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your past sins – being added by the Lord to His church?
  - b. And, for those of you who have done this, do you always repent of your sins out of a heart moved by godly sorrow, and do you then confess those sins to your Father in heaven?
3. If you need to do either of these this morning, we encourage you to do it now.