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Editorial

QUALITY CONTROL

Smith Bibens

Every year, a number of professionals are subjected to disciplinary action for malpractice or malfeasance. Recently, a pharmacist in the Kansas City area was tried and sentenced for diluting cancer medicine. Obviously, he no longer works as a pharmacist. Other professionals are held to standards of conduct as well. In the State of Missouri for 1990, sixteen lawyers were disbarred, six suspended, two were publicly reprimanded, and thirty-eight received private letters of reprimand, according to the Office of Disciplinary Action of the Missouri Supreme Court. In the same year, 187 doctors were disciplined for various violations of the state standards for the medical profession, according to the state office that investigates complaints against doctors.

What would happen if there were no standards of conduct for the various professions? What would happen if these standards were ignored, or if no disciplinary action were taken against violaters? What if any doctor who had his license suspended in Kansas just moved across the line to Missouri and resumed his practice, knowing that nothing would be done to bring him in check? Would you want an accountant or banker, whose qualifications and ethics were suspect, to handle your money? Would you feel safe if you knew that the law enforcement officers flagrantly violated the very laws they promised to uphold? If you knew that the state you lived in was lax about enforcing professional standards, that would tend to undermine your confidence in all these professionals and others, would it not?

What happened to members of the church in apostolic times who did not live up to an acceptable standard in their Christian profession? Well, the Lord saw fit to include in the New Testament a system of “quality control” for the church-church discipline. This subject is touched upon a number of times in the teaching of the New Testament, particularly in the epistles of Paul (Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 6:3-5; Tit. 3:10), but elsewhere also (Mt. 18:15-17; 2 Jn. 9-11).

Old Testament

Discipline for God’s people is not unique to the New Testament. Under the Law, a number of sins were punishable by death. This was a form of discipline for the nation of Israel. Several times in the book of Deuteronomy, after prescribing stoning to death for a certain sin, Moses added “So shalt thou put evil away from the midst of thee” (cf. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24, 27). In another time, Ezra had to take the children of Israel to task for marrying foreign women. Many repented in deep contrition, but what of those who refused to submit to this discipline? They lost all their property and were separated from the restored people of Israel (Ezra 10:1-8).

The New Testament does not authorize the church to withdraw from members for every sin they might commit. Failure to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; to visit the sick, the imprisoned and the poor: these are sins that people will be condemned for on that Great Day (Mt. 25:41-46; cf. Mt. 13:24-30; 37-43). When people hear preaching from God’s Word that reproves their sin, they are being disciplined by God, and this should be enough to stir them to repentance (2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 12:2-11) Yet, the New Testament reveals that there are certain sins that will poison the fellowship of the saints, spread like leaven in dough, undermine the truth, destroy the influence of the church, and jeopardize whole congregations, if not dealt with by strong, effective discipline.

This strong, effective discipline takes place at the congregational level. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus makes it clear that if the first two attempts to correct the erring brother fail, “tell it unto the church.” The word for “church” is *ekklesia*, “assembly.” As Rotherham’s translation puts it: “tell it to the assembly.” This is not the “universal” church! It is a local congregation. It is at the congregational level where scriptural discipline is

exercised. Paul told the Corinthians, concerning the man guilty of fornication, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together . . . 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).

A local congregation of believers not only has the right to exercise scriptural discipline, but the obligation to do so. Whether one refuses to repent of a sin against a brother (Mt. 18:15-17), or one is guilty of teaching false doctrine (Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Jn. 9-11), or one is a heretic (“schismatic, factious,” Thayer 16) (Tit. 3:10), or an immoral person (1 Cor. 5:11); the congregation must act. The congregation owes it to the guilty party—they might be converted and saved (Jam. 5:19-20). The congregation owes it to the Lord—He wants His bride pure (2 Cor. 11:2). What happens if a congregation fails in this obligation? Read Jesus’ words to the church of Thyatira, who “suffered” (allowed) a false prophetess to spread her evil doctrine (Rev. 2:20-24).

When a local congregation is scripturally obligated to exercise discipline, other congregations should respect that action. Paul warned Timothy about Hymenaeus and Alexander, blasphemers, who had been “delivered unto Satan” (1 Tim. 1:20; cf. 1 Cor. 5:5). Faithful brethren need to be informed about those who are being scripturally disciplined. If this does not happen, the sinner may simply go elsewhere and spread his “leaven” there. Sometimes the party being disciplined does go elsewhere, to escape discipline, and is accepted. This undermines the purpose of scriptural discipline and places the brethren who accept the offender in spiritual jeopardy. Discipline is undermined because the offender thinks he is “off the hook,” instead of being turned to repentance by a solid front presented by faithful brethren against his error. The accepting congregation(s) are in jeopardy, because extending fellowship to those who are in the wrong makes one a partaker in the offender’s offense (2 Jn. 9-11). For example, when a congregation accepts a heretic into fellowship it becomes a party to his heresy.

Objections to Church Discipline

As this and following articles bear out, the Bible teaches the Lord’s church to practice church discipline. Broadly defined, church discipline is

everything involved in edifying and purifying the Lord's church. This includes the teaching of her members both the milk and the meat of the Word. It involves the essential and ordinary correction that takes place in the life of individual Christians when they are admonished by God's Word—"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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17-18). This involves self discipline. But when a disciple's self discipline fails, God has graciously provided a safety net for His children-the discipline afforded by other saints as treated in the following articles.

Sadly, there are many who object to the practice of scriptural church discipline. Some portray church discipline as a draconian measure that is a left-over of the dark ages; a revival of the infamous Inquisition. Church discipline has sometimes been nothing more than an act of retribution; or has been exercised in a haughty and malignant manner. However, the fact that abuses have existed in the practice of church discipline is no argument against the scriptural practice of church discipline.

Let us look at some of the more arguments against church discipline and the response to make to them.

"No one is worthy of withdrawing fellowship from another"

Since no one is perfect it is reasoned no one is qualified to initiate discipline against another. John 8:7 is usually appealed to: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." To use this passage in this way is twisting Scripture (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16). Though Paul was not perfect he rendered his judgment in cases when needed (1 Tim. 1:15, 19-20; 1 Cor. 5:3, 12-13). Parents are not perfect, yet they have the duty of disciplining their children (Eph. 6:4; Prov. 13:24; 15:10; 23:13-14).

In John 8, the Jews bring a woman to Jesus who they claim was caught in the very act of adultery. They ask Jesus if He will agree that the Law of Moses commands that such be stoned. However, these men were insincere, for they were only "...testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him" (Jn. 8:7). They thought they had Jesus between a rock and a hard place. If Jesus said, "Yes, she should be

stoned,” they could report to the Roman authorities that there was a man named Jesus who was teaching disobedience of Roman law, which did not allow the Jews to exercise capital punishment. If Jesus answered, “No, do not stone her,” they could turn to the Jewish people and say, “This fellow teaches us to ignore the Law of Moses!”

The Lord, however, turned the tables by highlighting their inconsistency. According to the Law of Moses, both “the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:10). But where was the adulterer? These men claimed that this woman was taken in the very act, so what became of her partner in crime? Obviously, something is not right here. Another provision of the Law of Moses required the witnesses in a death penalty case (who had to be two or three in number), to be the first ones to throw stones at the condemned person (Deut. 17:7). So when Jesus said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,” He was challenging the eyewitnesses of her crime to step forward and begin the job of killing her. The challenge was not accepted. “Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last” (Jn. 8:9). Their malignant designs had boomeranged on them. They slipped away, exposed as frauds in the eyes of the people around Jesus (cf. 8:2).

One further point-while Jesus said He would not condemn the woman because there was no one left to accuse her, He did condemn her sin-”Go and sin no more” (8:11). This story must not be twisted to teach that condemning or rebuking sin is wrong. This episode in the life of the Lord teaches the exact opposite.

This is what church discipline is for-condemning sin. Like her Lord, the church must be about the business of seeking and saving the lost (Lk. 19:10). Seeking and saving the lost, when they are wayward members of the church, is one of the goals of church discipline. Church discipline seeks to recover the wayward. As Paul says, “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” (1 Cor. 5:5). By severing the offender from the fellowship of the church, until such a time as they may repent, also protects and saves the church from further corruption. Therefore, church discipline is one facet of the church’s work of seeking the salvation of the lost (cf. Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20).

“Leave the tares to God”

Appeal may be made to the teaching in the Parable of Tares (Mt. 13:24-30; 26-43). The point is made that judgment is solely the Lord's business and will be executed on the final day. Wayne Jackson responds,

...no parabolic teaching can be arrayed against clear Bible instruction given elsewhere. This argument is like suggesting that simply because the debtor (in the parable of the unmerciful servant) was forgiven by his Lord, with no conditions being stated (Mt. 18:27), one may conclude that salvation is totally unconditional!

One lesson of the parable of the tares is a warning against the kind of judgment seen in the Dark Ages—burning at the stake, mutilation, and such like. This is not the kind of church discipline the Bible teaches and which I am defending in this article. The overall lesson of the parable concerns final, eternal judgment. No one but the Lord has that right. The main lesson of the parable, however, concerns the inability of the Lord's servants to know all the evil that needs to be rooted out. We cannot see into men's hearts and many sins may be hid from our eyes. It is only the Lord's eyes that “...are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). Where sin is clearly identifiable, as in the case of 1 Corinthians 5, we have the responsibility to reprove, rebuke and exercise scriptural discipline. “Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after” (1 Tim. 5:24).

“Judge not!”

If Jesus forbade all judgment by His teaching in Matthew 7:1ff., then what did He mean when He said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (Jn. 7:24). This article has already noticed several passages that enjoin us to exercise scriptural judgment. Bringing together all the Bible has to say about judgment leads one to the conviction that there is such a thing as righteous judgment and also a wrong kind of judgment. Judgment that aims to exact revenge, get even, or is

destructive in intent is wrong. This is how the Lord's enemies often tried to judge Him. Judgment that seeks to destroy sin, while calling upon the sinner to repent, is right. Such judgment is not destructive, but constructive. (See "Criticism-Giving It, Taking It," March 1993 CE for a full treatment of this subject.) Judgment that is made according to some subjective standard is wrong. Judgment that is rendered according to the objective standard of God's Word is right. Judgment rendered by one who is hypocritical, inconsistent, rife with sine themselves, is wrong. Judgment by a spiritual person (though not flawless) is right (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). If righteous judgment was not allowed, how could we ever determine that a brother had erred from the way and needed restoring? (Cf. Jas. 5:19-20; Lk. 15; Gal. 2:11-14). Read through Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus. If righteous judgment is impossible, then an evangelist or elder could not even fulfill their functions in the Lord's church.

"You are being unloving!"

More than once this writer has heard Christians being accused of being unloving because they condemned sin or practiced scriptural church discipline. As a parent, this writer has had the experience of being accused of being unloving because I disciplined my children. We have already learned that the Bible teaches that loving one's children compels one to discipline them betimes. The Lord has the same attitude toward His children. "For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:6, RSV). "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Failing to tirelessly work at bringing erring lambs back into the fold is unloving because it expresses an uncaring spirit. Discipline is a reflection of love, not a rejection of love.

"What about them?"

When church discipline has not been correctly and consistently applied, it may be hard to start doing so, because some will feel they are unfairly handled or treated with bias. First, there is no room for showing "respect of persons" in church discipline. Our close friends and family are entitled to the same spiritual care and concern manifested in the

process of church discipline as someone who is a stranger to us. The process may be much more painful and personal, but we cannot practice partiality. Second, the failures of the past do not excuse one who fails in the present. In the past, no doubt, many congregations have been remiss in their duty to exercise consistent church discipline. If a congregation resolves to do better, however, they are taking the right step. Just because we have been wrong in the past does not give us license to be wrong in the future.

Conclusion

We send forth this issue, containing as it does several articles on church discipline, in hopes of raising the level of knowledge in the churches on this subject. We pray that all will prayerfully consider the articles in this issue.

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“IF HE SHALL HEAR THEE”
MATTHEW 18: 15-17

By Greg Gay

One of the greatest tragedies in the church is when Christians sin against one another. God is certainly disappointed when His children do not walk in the light in any area of life, but He must be especially disappointed when He sees His children biting and devouring one another in sin. God wants and expects our interactions with one another in the church of Christ to exemplify love, respect, and holiness.

The Apostle Paul describes the relationships we are to enjoy in the church. “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:2). He also writes: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Eph. 5:1-2).

To walk in love is to walk together in agreement as well. We are never to sacrifice obedience to God’s truths in seeking to walk together in love. The Apostle John writes: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 Jn. 4).

Jesus taught: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn. 13:34-35). The love that Jesus says we are to possess to such a degree that it becomes an identifying characteristic of our discipleship is **agape** love—love that is fulfilled by action and service. This is the love God displayed toward us in the giving of His Son, Jesus (Jn. 3:16).

Even though it is God's desire that we love one another and walk in truth in one accord, He wisely makes divine provision for what we are to do when we sin against one another. One area of the Word of God that deals with this subject is Matthew 18.

In Matthew 18 we find the two great themes of repentance and forgiveness. For Jesus to spend so much time on these subjects, illustrating them so clearly, should let us know these subjects are very important to learn.

In the first part of the chapter (Mt. 18:1-11), Jesus uses a child to illustrate the innocence and preciousness of kingdom citizens. He pronounces a "woe," foretelling future eternal calamity, upon anyone who dares to influence any of God's children to sin. How far should one go to avoid hurting a fellow believer? We should prefer to have a millstone tied to us and be thrown into the depths of the sea.

We are also to avoid carefully being influenced by others to sin. How far are we to go to avoid committing sin? Jesus uses the exaggerated examples of cutting off our hands and feet and plucking out our eyes rather than using them to sin and losing our souls in hell.

We should prefer to die rather than to influence anyone to sin, and we should prefer to lose part of our physical body before we would sin and become an erring child of God and promoting sinful behavior that causes others to be lost.

We dare not say the loss of a Christian here or there makes no difference to God. Jesus illustrates the importance of every believer by telling the story of the one lost sheep the shepherd goes to find, leaving behind the ninety and nine who are not lost (Mt. 18:12-14).

At the end of the chapter (Mt. 18: 21-35), Jesus illustrates the importance of being willing to forgive one another. He tells the story of a servant who was forgiven a debt that was so huge it was impossible to repay. Then, that same forgiven servant would not forgive a fellow servant a very small debt. He was punished because he who was given mercy failed to be merciful. Jesus' point of the story is this: if we are not willing to forgive one another, God will not forgive us. Therefore, we determine whether or not God forgives us by the attitudes we manifest toward one another.

But what if a Christian is not deterred by God's warnings and goes ahead with a trespass against another Christian? What is the Christian to do that has been trespassed against?

Jesus answers with these words from Matthew 18:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 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 (Mt. 18:15-17).

Christians Only

Notice that the issue Jesus addresses in Matthew 18:15-17 is between brethren, meaning two Christians. These verses do not apply when someone of the world sins against a Christian. We are to expect worldly people to sin against us. Paul tells us: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter says: “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Pet. 2:20). “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

The Trespass

A trespass is a sin, a violation of the commands, examples, and inferences of God’s Word. This means the trespass cannot be merely hurt feelings. It also cannot be a difference of opinion regarding a liberty as described in Romans 14, where one can do or not do what is in question and God accepts them regardless of their choice (Rom. 14:1-6). For example, we may not appreciate someone’s perfume, but that does not mean they have sinned against us. We may not like where someone sits during worship but that is not a sin. These are issues for mature and wise Christians to keep to themselves. When immature and unwise Christians attempt to make these types of things sins, mature and wise congregational leadership must gently rebuke the one who says they have been offended.

There are textual questions about the words translated “against thee” in the phrase “trespass against thee” in Matthew 18:15. If the words are not genuine then the passage would refer to all sin in general. But if the words are genuine then the passage refers to sin committed against a fellow believer. Regardless of the difficulty of determining if those words are in the original, Peter’s question to Jesus regarding His teaching indicates he understood Jesus to be talking about private sins of a fellow believer. “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Mt. 18:21-22).

Private Rebuke for Private Trespass

Once someone has committed a trespass against us Jesus says we are to “go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” Notice how very private this begins. Yes, we are to rebuke our brother, but the rebuke is to be as private as the offense.

When We Rebuke Someone for Their Sin

When we are the recipients of a trespass we should remember to be more filled with sorrow than with anger that such a sin has happened at all. How God must feel when his children hurt one another in such ways! Yes, we must go to our brother, but our heart is broken because his soul is in danger of being lost. Our words of rebuke must be chosen very carefully. Paul warns, “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).

When We Are The One Being Rebuked for Our Sin

What should our attitude be when we are confronted by a brother and told we have trespassed against him? Rather than swelling with pride, rather than striking back, rather than being filled with anger, we should remember that our attitude is to be that we would rather have a millstone tied around our neck and die then to sin against our brother. So, of course, we should be filled with sorrow and look for immediate ways to eliminate the possibility of sin. There is no room for haughtiness here.

It is intended that the knowledge that someone has anything against us should trouble us greatly and lead to repentance. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mt. 5:23-24).

The Desired Result

Jesus says, "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Mt. 18:15). We want our brother to hear us. We want our brother, our brother in sin, to be restored to faithfulness. If our brother repents, prayer for forgiveness and restoration is certainly in order and likely nothing more needs to be done.

But what if he does not listen? It may be that the sinning brother decides that what he is being accused of doing is either not true or is not a sin. Jesus answers: "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" (Mt. 18:16).

This is the same as the Old Testament rule in dealing with a situation where the word of one person was not enough for a person to be considered guilty of violating the Law. "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death" (Deut. 17:6).

Who Should You Take With You?

Knowledge of the sin must now be shared, but only on a very limited basis. Notice that no more than one or two additional people, as required by the Scriptures, need to know of the problem. Notice how God protects the honor of the sinful brother. Remember, our desire is to solve the problem as privately and as quickly as is reasonably possible.

I would think the ones to take with us would be someone who has influence in the life of the person who has sinned. I do not think we would want strangers to the sinner to attempt to help with the situation, even though their Bible knowledge may be excellent. This can be complicated if there is more than one congregation involved. I would think the best help would come from the congregation of the brother who has committed the offense.

What If No One Will Go With You?

If no one will go with the one who believes he has been trespassed against it should make him reconsider whether or not there has been a misunderstanding or a difference of opinion rather than the committing of a sin. These are very serious matters and must be approached very carefully.

The Desired Result

The goal here is the same as that of the previous meeting. Jesus says, "if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Mt. 18:15). Again, we want our brother to hear us. Again, we want our brother, our brother in sin, to be restored to faithfulness. Again, if our brother repents, certainly prayer for forgiveness and restoration is in order and likely nothing more needs to be done.

What if he does not hear? If after two meetings the offending brother is still stubbornly insisting he is not wrong and is not going to repent of his sin that has now been established in the "mouth of two or three witnesses" there are more sad steps to take.

The next step is public exposure of the sin. "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" (Mt. 18:17).

When The Church Is Told

If the leadership of the congregation has not been involved previously they would need to be approached now to be informed and to approve this action beforehand and to be the ones to make the decision regarding proceeding with the required announcement. Just because a person thinks someone has sinned against them and just because they have gathered others who agree with them does not guarantee there is sin.

When the announcement is made the entire congregation has an obligation to be a positive influence to try to win their brother. Personal, family, and congregational prayer in hope of the repentance of the offending brother would certainly be in order, but other action is also demanded. Whatever anyone can do to try to influence the brother to repent so he can be safe in God's sight must be done at this time. Let all who are able to do so communicate in the many ways possible (personal visits, cards, letters, phone calls, emails) in the hope that he might be saved.

After the announcement is made it is not the place of the others in the congregation to “retry” the matter. This is not to be a time of debate. This is to be a time to trust that what has been announced is valid and all must join together to influence the offending brother to repentance.

Embarrassing family members

The public announcement of a lack of repentance must be done as respectfully as possible for the sake of all concerned, but it still must be done. Family members of the offending brother may be embarrassed and should be given special comfort and assurances of love and care during this tragic time in their lives. I think it only respectful to warn any family members of the offending brother that the announcement is going to be made at a certain service. That is not so the family can run to another congregation but so they can be there in full support of the truth even as they mourn. The family of the erring brother should not be part of the decision making process in deciding to announce the brother’s sin lest their embarrassment hinder necessary actions.

The Desired Result

The goal here is the same as the previous meetings. Jesus says, “If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Mt. 18:15). Again, we want our brother to hear us. Again, we want our brother, our brother in sin, to be restored to faithfulness. Again, if our brother repents, certainly prayer for forgiveness and restoration is in order and likely nothing more needs to be done.

If after two meetings and exposure to the entire congregation the offending brother is still stubbornly insisting he is not wrong and is not going to repent of his sin there is one more sad step to take.

The last step is public censure, rejection from fellowship. “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” (Mt. 18:17). As before, this public announcement must be done as respectfully as possible for all concerned. The entire congregation should now mourn the loss of their brother to Satan’s devices.

Usual Communication Stops

At this point the offending brother has no fellowship with the church and is the recipient of the discipline of the church. Fellowship has been withdrawn from him.

There is much debate on how far this censure must go. Let me simply point out, at a minimum, there must be a change in the relationship all have with the censured sinner. We must expect those who are immature in the faith to not understand and perhaps not cooperate. There can be other complications where limited or even no cooperation would be expected, such as in the spouse and young children of the offending brother. But, for others who are supposedly mature in Christ to pretend the withdrawal of fellowship never happened does not help. In fact, it is wrong.

Church Discipline by The Church Local for The Church Universal

Once the congregation makes the decision to withdraw fellowship their action is conducted locally for the church universal. Just as we do not have to be baptized again when we move from congregation to congregation, in like manner, church discipline does not have to be repeated by every congregation. One congregation's action is sufficient for the whole church.

When erring members who are disciplined flee to a nearby congregation they should not be accepted with open arms. They need to be told they are expected to go back where they came from and clear up the matter of the discipline that is outstanding against them. Then, if they want to come back they will be welcomed.

Private Rebuke for Public Trespass?

It is not unusual to hear that we must approach a public offender privately following the steps of Matthew 18:15-17 before there can be any action of public rebuke. Certainly, the steps of Matthew 18:15-17 apply today to many situations, but it is not likely they should be seen as prescriptive for every situation of discipline.

We can see that the Apostle Paul did not follow Matthew 18:15-17 when he handled a situation with the Apostle Peter. When Peter went astray in Antioch we are told Paul "withstood him to the face because he was to be

blamed” (Gal. 2:11) and Paul tells us he confronted Peter “before them all” (Gal. 2:14).

It appears elders convincing gainsayers (Tit. 1:9) may be called upon to do so in situations that make a private rebuke impossible, such as in the public assembly if a false teacher presents false doctrine in public.

Since Jesus gave the words of Matthew 18:15-17 to the apostles and since we see apostles not following them in every situation requiring rebuke and discipline, I believe we can conclude that Matthew 18:15-17 is not intended for every situation. I think we know that. For example, I do not believe our brethren would remain silent until they could arrange a private meeting if someone were to wheel a piano into the church building right before worship on Lord’s Day and start playing the songs as they were announced. We would likely follow-up with further meetings, but such violations would be handled immediately.

All of us are prone to get our feathers ruffled when someone speaks out against us. We all want what we do to be acceptable to all. But, sometimes we err. If our errors are private, I think we can expect Matthew 18:15-17 to be followed. But, if our errors are public, I do not think we should be surprised if we are rebuked publicly and that few would approach us individually.

I am sure God would hope our hearts would be tender for the truth even if we are hurt by how we are opposed. I rather doubt Peter liked being rebuked by Paul in front of everyone when it happened, let alone to have the confrontation recorded by inspiration for eternity. Yet how he responded proved his love for the truth meant more than his personal feelings.

It looks like the Bible’s response to error is related to knowledge and possible influence of the error. A private sin is to be handled between just two people if at all possible. On the other hand, when false teaching was spread from congregation to congregation, truth’s response was given from congregation to congregation and even written in the form of a letter to be shared openly (Acts 15).

How Long Does The Process Take?

There are no guidelines that demand the steps of Matthew 18:15-17 must take few or many days. I would think it wise to give an offending brother plenty of time to think about his repentance, but not so long that all is forgotten and

swept under the rug. It is likely any deadlines given for repentance need to be quite flexible.

What If He Never Repents?

If our brother never repents then we continue to mourn his rebellion. We want to always be able to look back on the situation with a clear conscience knowing we did our best to help save our brother. Whether a few days or many years go by so long as the brother never repents he is to be known as a rebellious brother who refuses God's discipline in his life.

Brethren, if we work hard to serve one another lawfully in the kingdom it is unlikely discipline will ever be necessary. We are free to serve one another. Let us show our thankfulness for that freedom by the service we render to others and let us be very careful to not sin against one another.

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another (Gal. 5:13-15).

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EVERYONE WELCOME? A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 5

George Battey

When literature is printed for a congregation, one usually sees somewhere in the brochure the address of the church building, the times of the services and the words, “Everyone Welcome.” Our postmodern society takes these words to the ultimate extreme. No one is considered evil enough or dangerous enough to be unwelcome at the services of the church. “After all,” it is reasoned, “this is the Lord’s church and we must allow everyone who appears at the door to enter the services.”

In contrast to today’s permissiveness, the church of the first century was not so tolerant. They were not so gullible as to think it harmless for anyone and everyone to attend the services of the Lord’s church. There seems to be a scriptural precedent for physically refusing certain ones into the assembly (cf. Jn. 20:19; Acts 9:26; 12:12-16; 1 Cor. 5:5, 7, 11, 13; Gal. 5:12). While it is never right for Christians to physically attack anyone (Mt. 5:39ff), brethren in the first century church did not consider screening those who entered their assembly to be an unreasonable nor unchristian practice. On the contrary, they believed that opening the doors to all the world and welcoming everyone was a dangerous practice. The practice of barring the door to certain ones (Acts 9:26) was not viewed as a violation of the obligation to present the gospel to “every creature” (Mk. 16:15), but was viewed as “not casting pearls before swine” (Mt. 7:6).

On Friday, September 26, 1997, Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed into law a new ordinance for his country. This new law forbade unregistered churches in Russia to meet publicly, to conduct religious services (e.g. communion and baptism), and to publicly proclaim their doctrine (including advertising). The congregation of the church of Christ meeting in Tula, Russia was (and remains to this day) an unregistered church. This congrega-

tion is unregistered, not by choice, but because the Russian government has repeatedly refused to accept their application for registration. On Sunday, September 28, just two days after the new law was signed, the brethren gathered for worship. A stranger appeared whom the brethren did not recognize. They thought it odd that, immediately following the publication of the new anti-religion law, this unknown man appeared for worship. Fearing he might be a spy for the Orthodox Church, the brethren asked him to leave. He was not welcome to sit in a service where a "religious act" (i.e. communion) was going to occur. (This visitor, however, was given an invitation to meet later to discuss the Scriptures if his interests were indeed about spiritual matters.) This is a modern-day example of the events of John 20:19.

While it may be easy to see that some should be refused who might persecute, what about those who might corrupt the church? The inspired apostle addressed this very issue in 1 Corinthians 5.

Meet The Man

Let us meet a man and see the problem created when one threatens, by his immoral lifestyle, the purity of the church.

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 (1 Cor. 5:1)!

"It is actually reported." The KJV has, "reported commonly," which is a good translation. Reports were circulating widely about what the Corinthian church was tolerating.

"That there is sexual immorality among you." The Greek has the word **porneia** which means "illicit sexual relations in general." "Fornication" (KJV) includes all types of sexual misbehavior including, as in the present text, incest.

"And such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles; that a man has his father's wife!" Let us enumerate the things we know about this man:

1. We know he is a member of the church, for he must be "taken away from among you" (v. 2); he's part of the "lump" (v. 7); he is not part of the "world" (v. 10) who should be left alone; he's called a "brother" (v. 11).
2. The woman appears to be his stepmother, for the Scripture is careful to say "his father's wife" and not "his mother."

3. The woman does not appear to be a Christian, for no instructions are given about disciplining her. Since the church does not pass judgment and enact discipline on those “in the world” (v. 12), she must be “in the world” (i.e., a non-Christian).
4. This son is guilty of a very grievous sin—a sin which most unbelievers would refuse to commit.

See The Response

And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. (1 Cor. 5:2)

They were proud! They were glad to have him come to worship with them. He was “welcome.” The second half of this verse actually contains a question and should be so translated. The question anticipates a positive answer. The NIV has, “Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?” What is the expected answer to this question? “Yes!” The brethren should be grieving and “putting him out.” This is a difficult concept for brethren living in a postmodern society. Some cannot conceive that when certain people come to the assembly, there should be no joy to see them arrive. Some in the church are living sinfully and shamefully. They attend the assembly, not to repent, but to worship and to have fellowship. This man should not be allowed to fellowship with the church. The Apostle Paul did not believe, “the more, the merrier” or “the bigger, the better.” The church is better off without some people. We should not be glad to see just anyone and everyone walking into the assembly, because some people are not coming to repent; they are coming to find acceptance while living an evil lifestyle.

Paul's Absence

Listen to the verdict pronounced by the apostle upon this fellow:

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 (1 Cor. 5:3-5).

"I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged" (v. 3). Paul did not need to be present to pass judgment on this matter. He did not need to hear the other side of the story. Immorality is wrong no matter what the extenuating circumstances might be. Therefore, there is no need to have a trial to examine the circumstances. Immoral Christians do not need a trial; they need discipline.

Notice that the four-step plan of Matthew 18:15-17 is never mentioned by Paul. The church did not have to send someone privately to speak with the guilty brother. There did not have to be a second visit with "two or three witnesses." Nor did there have to be a third appeal by the entire church before action was formally taken. Matthew 18:15-17 applies to cases where "your brother sins against you" (Mt. 18:15). To apply Matthew 18 to more than personal offences is to do more than Jesus said. (For further study on this point, see the articles written by Alan Bonifay and Greg Gay in this issue of the **Christian's Expositor**.)

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 4). "In the name of the Lord" means "by the Lord's authority." When the church enacts discipline they are doing in the Lord's absence what the Lord Himself would do if He were personally present. "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge the things I write are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37).

The same One who created and sustains man, and the same One who is our Savior and our anointed King and High Priest, is the same Master who sanctions the discipline that should be delivered. Discipline is neither unchristian nor ungodly. The Lord Himself commands it. It is to be done with His name attached to it.

"When you are gathered together" (v. 4). Discipline is something to be administered in the assembly by the entire congregation. Everyone must see and learn a lesson (cf. Deut. 13:10-11). Concerning leaders of the church who sin, Paul wrote, "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20). Discipline is a congregational matter. It is not for a single man to enact, but the entire congregation must be involved. "Along with my spirit" (v. 4). The Apostle Paul himself is wholeheartedly in favor of administering the discipline. If he were present in person, he himself would participate in this discipline.

"With the power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 4). Jesus Himself is on the side of the congregation administering the discipline.

Please think back to Matthew 18:15-20. Though the context there concerns, not immorality, but personal offenders, yet we learn something about the Lord's attitude in disciplinary proceedings. Read verse 20 in its context of church discipline: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). In disciplinary action, Jesus is on the side of the "two or three witnesses" (18:16). He stands fully and firmly behind the congregation which follows His instructions about discipline.

"Deliver such a one" (v. 5). This encompasses, not just the fornicator mentioned in verse 1, but "such a one"—i.e. any person who falls into moral sin, whether it be sexual sin, lying, dishonesty of any kind, and all immorality.

"To Satan" (v. 5). Simply put, it appears this fellow (and all "such ones") is (are) being put out of the church's "membership." He is not welcome to come to the assembly in his present, unrepentant state.

"For the destruction of the flesh" (v. 5). This states the purpose for the discipline—to destroy the desire to live after the flesh.

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience (Col. 3:5-6).

Perhaps those put out of the church will reevaluate things; even be motivated to "put to death the works of the flesh" in their lives, repent, and thus "save their spirit"—the most valuable possession they have (Mt. 16:26).

Protecting The Congregation

There is, in fact, as Paul goes on to point out, a greater reason for discipline than simply saving the spirit of a single man. The sinful member may never repent, but brethren must think about something else—the congregation.

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 (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

“A little leaven” (v. 6) refers to the fornicator (v. 1). “The whole lump” (v. 6) refers to the congregation. There is a chance the entire congregation can be ruined if the fornicator continues to attend worship in fellowship. To illustrate, if my hand developed an infection and would not improve, it would be better to have the hand severed from the body than for the entire body to become infected and eventually die—so said the Lord (Mt. 5:30).

“Purge out the old leaven” (v. 7). Put the fornicator out of the congregation. Call it what you will, but “purge out” means the man is “not welcome.”

Someone may argue, “We don’t have the right to tell a man he is not welcome at the services of the Lord’s church.” Yet this passage itself constitutes such authority. This passage means something. It is absurd to argue that the church should be “grieving over” the fornicator’s sinful lifestyle (v. 2), that he should be “delivered to Satan” (v. 5) and “purged out” (v. 7), and then conclude, “He’s still welcome to come to the services in order to commune, contribute, pray, sing, and study.” Where is the logic? Where is the scriptural authority for such a conclusion?

“Purging out leaven” should remind us of the Old Testament Passover. Israel was not allowed to have any leaven in their houses. “You shall remove leaven from your houses...No leaven shall be found in your houses” (Ex. 12:15, 19). Israel was about to eat a spiritual meal and all the leaven had to be removed.

“Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (v. 7). Jesus and the Lord’s Supper are being compared to the Passover of the Old Testament. The Passover meal was a type of the Lord’s Supper. Israel ate the Passover meal with no leaven in their houses and the church is to eat the Lord’s Supper without leaven in the congregation.

“Let us keep the feast” (v. 8). This refers to the Lord’s Supper.

“Not with old leaven” (v. 8). This refers to the fornicator (see vv. 6-7). The feast (Lord’s supper) is not to be eaten with leaven (the fornicator).

“Nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness” (v. 8). More than the fornicator of verse 1 is included in this prohibition. Any member with malice (ill will toward others) or wickedness (immorality) in their lives should not be eating “the feast” with the rest of the congregation. Some take the Lord’s Supper too lightly. If taken too lightly, brethren need to consider that they may be profaning the Lord’s Supper by turning it into a common meal of which anyone and everyone is allowed to partake. The Lord’s Supper is a sacred meal. It

is not for unbelievers (1 Cor. 10:17; 11:32). It is not for members who have malice and wickedness in their lives.

Someone may argue, “Where do we get the authority to say the Lord’s Supper cannot be served to immoral brethren?” The authority is found in 1 Corinthians 5:8, “Let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness.”

A very interesting phenomenon occurs in our brotherhood when discussing communion. Advocates of individual cups commonly argue, “Communion is strictly individual—just between the worshipper and God.” We respond by pointing out “communion” means “joint participation.” Communion necessarily involves all the members of the congregation sharing together the same loaf and the same cup. It is not strictly an individual matter. Yet, when it comes to discipline, some would argue, “Communion is strictly between an individual person and God.” Logically, it cannot be both ways. Either communion involves all the members together or it does not. If it involves all the members, then it becomes the concern of the congregation as to who partakes.

A common objection is that 1 Corinthians 11:28 says, “Let a man examine himself.” Since no mention is made of examining others, it is concluded the examination of others is forbidden. But the answer to this is the same as the answer to Baptist people regarding John 3:16. They argue, “John 3:16 does not mention baptism; therefore baptism is not necessary.” We respond by pointing out John 3:16 is not the final and exclusive passage on the subject. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 11:28 is not the final and exclusive passage on communion. After all, 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 comes before 1 Corinthians 11:28. When Paul wrote 11:28 the brethren already knew they were not supposed to “keep the feast” with those guilty of “malice” and “wickedness.” Communion has both congregational and individual responsibilities. So, although 11:28 mentions individual examination, this does not erase the fact that 5:7-8 mentions corporate examination.

“But with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (v. 8). Rather than “keeping the feast” (communion) with members who are filled with malice and wickedness, we are to eat the Lord’s Supper with brothers and sisters who are sincere and standing for truth.

Previous Instructions

Have you ever heard a parent say to his child, "I've told you a hundred times..." What is the point? The point is, the child should know better. He has been previously instructed. Corinth had been previously instructed. They should have known better.

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 (1 Cor. 5:9-10).

Paul is here correcting a misunderstanding. Some thought Paul had previously instructed them not to associate with anyone on earth who was immoral. Paul corrects this misunderstanding. To escape all immorality the brethren would have to leave the planet. His previous and current instructions apply to members of the church.

Clarification

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 (1 Cor. 5:11).

"Anyone named a brother." These instructions apply only to members of the church.

"Sexually immoral." This includes a wide variety of sexual sins: premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, etc.

"Covetous." Someone who casts his eyes on his neighbor's goods and desires to have them (cf. Ex. 20:17).

"Idolater." One who worships created things rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

"Reviler." One who attacks another verbally by railing (yelling, cursing), slandering, lying.

"Drunkard." One who drinks alcohol, not medicinally (1 Tim. 5:23), but recreationally.

“Extortioner.” A thief, robber, swindler.

“Such a person.” This indicates the list just given is not an exhaustive one. All the items on the list have one thing in common—they are all moral sins. They all involve the violation of moral law, not positive law (cf. Gal. 5:19-21).

There are two prohibitions given: (1) “Do not keep company,” that is, do not associate with such, and (2) “Do not even eat with such a person.” Notice the first prohibition, “Do not keep company.” Does this mean inside or outside the assembly? Can we logically or scripturally argue “association” applies only outside the assembly? If so, what compels us to reach such a conclusion? Perhaps we should simply do what the Lord commanded and have no association with these people inside or outside the assembly.

Notice the second prohibition, “Do not even eat with such a person.” Does this mean inside or outside the assembly? Can we logically or scripturally argue the “eating” applies only outside the assembly? If so, what compels us to reach such a conclusion? Perhaps we should simply do as the Lord commanded and not eat with such people—inside or outside the assembly. After all, instructions were already given to “not keep the feast with the old leaven, for even Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us” (vv. 7-8). In the light of verses 7-8, it would seem that “do not eat” would certainly include the Lord’s Supper. It is absurd to say on the one hand, “We may not eat a common meal with such people,” and then say on the other hand, “We may eat a sacred meal with such people.” How can eating a Big Mac at McDonald’s with such people be worse than eating the communion with them in the worship assembly? This conclusion defies logic and spiritual propriety.

E. M. Zerr argues in his commentary that 1 Corinthians 5:11 could not refer to communion because 5:9-10 says we may “eat” with those in the world, but may not eat with “such ones” of 5:11. Zerr reasons that since we eat only common meals with the world, the “eating” of 5:9-11 must refer only to common meals. However, careful examination reveals some significant things Zerr overlooked:

1. “Eating” is never specifically mentioned in 5:9-10, but it seems implied in the phrase “keep company with.”
2. The word “even” points to an additional thing that may not be done “not even to eat with such a person” (5:11).
3. Two things are forbidden:
 - a. keeping company with such people and

b. eating with such people.

4. Common meals are included in the simple statement “keep company with” (5:9).

5. The additional mention of “eating” in 5:11 refers to more than a common meal; it refers to a sacred meal (see vv. 7-8 again).

“Association” is one thing and “eating” is an additional thing. Christians may “keep company with” those in the world (5:9-10). They may do all that is included in “keeping company with”—which includes eating common meals.

In contrast, Christians may not “keep company with” (a phrase which includes common meals) immoral members. In addition to this, Christians may not “even eat with” immoral members. Inasmuch as the only eating mentioned in this chapter is “the feast” (Lord’s supper, vv. 7-8), why conclude anything different in 5:11? Contextually, the apostle is saying:

1. Do not “keep company with” immoral members—including common meals.
2. Do not even eat “the feast”/“our passover” (vv. 7-8) with immoral members.

The Lord’s Supper is how we show fellowship with one another. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (koinonia) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion (koinonia) of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). This very same word translated “communion” here is translated “fellowship” elsewhere (1 Jn. 1:7; Eph. 5:11).

Withdrawing “fellowship” means withdrawing “communion,” for both words are from the same Greek word. “Withdrawing fellowship” to many simply means “not using” a brother to lead songs during the assembly. If this is “withdrawing fellowship,” then it becomes impossible to “withdraw fellowship” from an immoral sister, because no sister “leads” in the assemblies of the church.

Some argue, “We cannot wrestle the communion away from people right there during the assembly.” But this reasoning misses the point entirely. The question is not “Should brethren wrestle the communion away from someone?” but rather “Should brethren *offer* the communion to such people to begin with?” When brethren extend the offer to partake, they are extending fellowship. If the person in question is a known fornicator, then fellowship (**koinonia**, “communion”) is being extended rather than withdrawn. When scriptural discipline is enacted against an unrepentant brother, the leaders should inform the offender he is not welcome at the services because he has been “put away” (1 Cor. 5:13). The only exception to this should be when the guilty comes to repent and seek forgiveness on God’s terms. Should the

offender insist on staying without repenting, the one waiting on the table should inform the assembly the communion is only for those in fellowship with God—it is not for those who have been withdrawn from. The Lord's Supper should not knowingly and willfully be offered to one who has been “delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (1 Cor. 5:4-5, 8). I am not suggesting this is the exact procedure that brethren must follow, but this is my suggestion of what could be scripturally done.

The Russian Congregations

The congregations in Russia have a firmer grasp on how fellowship is demonstrated than many American congregations. Brother Jerry Cutter's work report of March 6, 2002 contains the following paragraph about an incident that occurred in the Penza, Russia congregation. As one can easily see, the Russian congregation pays more than “lip-service” to the idea of withdrawing “fellowship”/ “communion.”

The two leaders mentioned are 35 to 40 years old. One thing that impresses me is how maturely they handle problems. One vexing problem involved a sister who was very, very strong in the doctrine but, unfortunately, was strong-willed and overbearing, pushy and loud. She continued running members and visitors out the door faster than they could walk in. Finally the leaders, with the backing of the church, kindly asked her not to return until she got herself under control. This was not a sudden decision, but involved a matter that had continued for some years. ... Also, while we were there this time, there was a brother and sister that have a drinking problem, who came drunk one night. They were quietly told not to return again while drinking. The woman herself had previously been disfellowshipped for her drunkenness, and the church would not allow her to partake of the Lord's supper or attend any function or dinner involving the church (p. 1).

God Expects Judgment

For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

In 1 Corinthians 11:28 we are told that each person should “examine himself.” But here the congregation is told to “examine those who are inside” the church.

“Put away from yourselves the evil person” (v. 13). Put the evil person away, but still eat the communion with him? Still make him feel welcome? “Put away his influence, but not him personally,” someone argues? The Scripture says plainly, “Put away the evil person.” A person cannot be separated from his influence.

Conclusion

The original question posed by this article was, “Is everyone welcome in the assemblies of the church?” The answer is both “yes” and “no.” It depends on what one means by “everyone.”

If “everyone” is taken to mean “all races of people,” “all ages,” “all genders,” “everyone looking for truth,” “everyone who wishes to repent and be saved,” then the answer is a resounding “yes” (Is. 2:2).

If, on the other hand, “everyone” is taken to include police or spies trying to persecute, the answer is “no” (Jn. 20:19; Acts 9:26), not everyone is welcome. If “everyone” is taken to mean immoral members who have been disciplined, the answer again is “no” (1 Cor. 5:13). “Do not receive him into your house nor greet him” (2 Jn. 10), “...for he who greets him shares (**koinoneo**, “has communion/fellowship”) in his evil deeds” (2 Jn. 11).

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BIBLE TALK

Alan Bonifay

Should a congregation withdraw fellowship from an immoral person who has left the church?

First, it should be recognized that since the Bible does not specifically address this question, I can only give my judgment. However, Scripture does not leave us wholly bereft of insight from its pages.

The question turns on the purposes for withdrawal of fellowship that are delineated in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 5, two motives for such action are stated:

First Corinthians 5:6 says, “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” In my view these words contain what is the primary reason for withdrawing fellowship from someone—the protection of the congregation. The sins of immorality (1 Cor. 5:11) are so contagious that if left alone they will spread throughout the church. In such cases, therefore, swift and decisive action must be taken in order to protect the church.

The second reason for such drastic action is, of course, in hopes of shaming the immoral person into repentance (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). Obviously, it is not acceptable to practice church discipline in order to punish the offender or to take vengeance or to exact retribution.

Consequently, since the reasons for official exclusion are to protect the church and to restore the sinner, the action taken should have some reasonable hope of accomplishing one or both of these goals. If the immoral person in question has left the church and is in no way affecting the members of the church, I can see no profitable reason for taking such action. Each case should be evaluated in its own light, however. It is conceivable that an immoral person could continue to wield influence over members of the

church or might continue to affect the community's view of the church. In such a case action might still be required even though the guilty person has ceased to attend church services. But, in general, if one has quit the church and poses no danger to the members or to the church's reputation in the community, I would refrain from imposing congregational discipline. It appears to me that such action would be interpreted by most as vindictive.

When a congregation determines to withdraw fellowship from one of its members, is it essential to follow the process recorded in Matthew 18:15-18?

First, the passage in question reads:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he 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.

Notice, first, that the sin or trespass under consideration is one that involves a personal transgression—"if thy brother shall trespass against thee." Second, the passage is dealing with a real sin and not some minor irritation or slight. The word rendered "shall trespass" (KJV) or "sins" (NKJV; NIV) means "to act contrary to the will and law of God—to sin, to engage in wrongdoing" (Louw and Nida 1:773). Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich (49) and Perschbacher (17) voice the same in their lexicons. This fact should give the plaintiff pause to be certain that he can cite some Biblical passage that has been violated before he confronts his brother with a grievance. It may be that he should reconsider and not be so prone "to wear his feelings on his sleeve." However, having established that his brother has sinned against him, the offended is instructed to confront the offender. The third point of note—and the most relevant to the question asked—is that the sinning brother is given three opportunities to recognize his sin and to repent. If he fails to do so, the church is finally to withdraw fellowship from him.

Does this same process prevail in all such cases of church discipline? The short answer is, "No, it does not."

There are only a few passages in the New Testament (covering four situations other than the one discussed above) requiring such a drastic action as an official separation of fellowship. Each one must be interpreted in accord with its own context and none should be broadened to include action beyond the limits of the sins mentioned in the context.

However, in considering these passages at least two other procedures emerge. Consequently, the procedure to be followed in a particular action of congregational disfellowship depends on the context of the biblical passages involved:

1. For personal sins the procedure to follow is found in Mt. 18:15-18.
2. For discipline of the false teacher (1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Jn. 9-11), no precise process is legislated. However, if a man displays the negative characteristics of 1 Timothy 6:3-5 and refuses to recant, he must be withdrawn from quickly in order to protect the flock.
3. For discipline of the disorderly walker (a busybody who refuses to work, 2 Thess. 2:12-15), some more time and patience should be granted. (In this passage, Paul says that when he was at Thessalonica he commanded that these disorderly walkers should get back to work (3:10), but when he writes the second letter to them he commands that action be taken (3:11-12). Obviously, action cannot be suspended indefinitely. The leaders should be engaged in counseling those who walk disorderly and when it is determined that they refuse to repent, at that point action should be taken. Such discipline is necessary lest the brother's demonstrated lack of a Christian work ethic infect the whole congregation.
4. More pertinent are the procedures to be followed in the cases of the heretic (Tit. 3:10-11; Rom. 16:17-18) and the immoral brother or sister (1 Cor. 5). In the case of the heretic only two admonitions are to be granted; whereas in Matthew 18:15-18 three warnings are legislated. Undoubtedly, this reduction is due to the greater danger that the heretic poses to the congregation.
5. In the case of the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul rebukes the church for not yet having taken action and instructs them to do so when they assemble together. Since the sin is already "commonly reported" in Corinth and abroad, Paul does not even instruct the church to approach the fornicator first but rather to take action as soon as the truth is learned. This is because of the particularly contagious nature of moral sins (1 Cor. 5:6).

This is a very different kind of problem than the one discussed in Mt. 18:15-18.

In conclusion, the process to be followed when a congregation determines to withdraw fellowship is contingent upon the sin involved and the contextual setting of the New Testament passage requiring such action. In Matthew 18:15-18, in the case of personal sin, three warnings prior to action are mandated. In Titus 3:10-11, in the case of a heretic, only two admonitions are to be allowed. In the case of 1 Corinthians 5 and open immorality that is “commonly reported,” no warnings are required. In the other two such situations (false teachers, 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Jn. 9-11, and disorderly walkers, 2 Thess. 3:12-15) no process is clearly defined. However, leaders should use the other passages requiring withdrawal of fellowship, as well as their discretion, and do what will best protect the flock for which they are responsible.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Ronny F. Wade

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:1-2).

The Day of the Lord in the Old Testament

The “Day of the Lord” is an Old Testament concept, referring to that day when God would vindicate his righteous cause and execute judgment upon the unrighteous (cf. Amos 5:18; Joel 2:31; Mal. 4:5). This Day of Judgment is said to come upon various individuals and nations such as:

1. The proud and lofty: “For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low” (Is. 2:12).
2. Upon Egypt: “For this is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge himself of his adversaries...” (Jer. 46:10).
3. Upon false prophets and those who followed them: “Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord” (Ezek.. 13:5).
4. Upon the heathen: “For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head” (Obad. 15).

Homer Hailey remarked

It may be the introduction of judgment or the judgment itself. The “day of Jehovah” is a day in which Jehovah manifests Himself in the overthrow of His enemies. It is a day of terror to the enemies of God but a day of deliverance to the people of God (75).

The Day of The Lord in The New Testament

“The day of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 is the same day as the Second Coming in Hebrews 9:28. This day, will come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2) and the “Second Coming” will be as a thief in the night (Mt. 24:42-44). Further testimony indicating that these expressions are synonymous may be found in the other passages. In 2 Corinthians 1:14 the Corinthians are said to be Paul’s rejoicing “in the day of the Lord,” and the Thessalonians will be his rejoicing “at his coming” according to 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. The resurrection will take place at the “coming of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:33) and resurrection will take place at the “last day” (Jn. 6:44).

There are a number of terms used throughout the New testament to describe the “Day of the Lord”: “day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10); “the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14); “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8); “the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6); “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10; 2:16); “the Day of God” (2 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 16:14); “that day” (Mt. 7:22; 24:36); “the last day” (Jn. 6:39-40); “his day” (Lk. 17:24); “the revelation of Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7); “the appearing of Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8); “the coming of Christ” (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19); “the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30); “the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5); and “the day of judgment” (2 Pet. 2:9) (Meadows 327).

The Day of the Lord In 1 and 2 Thessalonians

The Second Coming of Christ is frequently mentioned in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Of the 136 verses that comprise the two books, 41 relate directly to the Second Coming.

1. The Thessalonians were to serve “and to wait for his Son from heaven...” (1 Thess. 1:10).
2. They were to be Paul’s hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing “in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming” (1 Thess. 2:19).

3. As they continued to increase and abound in love toward one another, and toward all men, they would have their heart established “unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:12-13).
4. Those asleep in Jesus “will God bring with him” (1 Thess.4:14).
5. Some will be “alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess.4:15).
6. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven...” (1 Thess.4:16).
7. “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2).
8. The Thessalonians were not in darkness that “that day” should overtake them as a thief (1 Thess. 5:4).
9. Paul wanted to be “preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess.5:23).
10. The Lord Jesus “shall be revealed from heaven (2 Thess. 1:10).
11. He is coming to be “glorified in his saints” (2 Thess. 1:10).
12. Paul besought them “by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:1).
13. Paul assured them that “the day of Christ” was not at hand (2 Thess. 2:2).
14. “That day” would not come before there was a falling away (2 Thess. 2:8).
15. Paul wanted God to direct their hearts unto love and unto the patient waiting for Christ” (2 Thess. 3:5) (Meadows 330).

Will there be A Rapture?

The idea of a rapture has gained in popularity in the recent years, especially among dispensational premillennialists. In his book **The Late Great Planet Earth**, Hal Lindsey describes it:

Rapture...is not found in the Bible...The word rapture means to snatch away or take out. But whether we call this event “the Rapture” or the “translation” makes no difference, the important thing is that it will happen. Drivers will disappear from their cars, students will suddenly vanish from classes, a football quarterback will be no more...(Lindsay 127).

Foy E. Wallace wrote,

The theory is that when the Lord comes “for his saints,” it will be the time of his “presence” (the parousia). But when he comes “with his saints,” it will be

the time of his “manifestation” the (epiphaneia). And it is argued that there will be a seven year period between the parousia and the epiphaneia. This period is what is called “rapture of the saints” in the heavens with the Lord, while the tribulation is blasting out its fury on the earth. (203).

The proof-text offered in support of the idea of a rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. Careful examination, however, reveals a number of discrepancies between what is actually taught in these passages and what premillennialists teach about them.

1. There is no discussion about the righteous and the wicked.
2. The discussion concerns those that are asleep in Jesus, and those that are alive in Christ.
3. The dead in Christ are said to rise first. Verse 16 is not speaking about them rising before the wicked dead, but rather to their being raised before the righteous living are caught up. They are both caught up together.
4. There are other New Testament passages such as John 5:28-29 that teach both righteous and wicked will be raised at the same time.
5. The verse teaches that we will be caught up to be with the Lord forever, not just seven years.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 teaches, “And then shall the wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness [Gk., **epiphaneia**] of his coming [**parousia**].” No time is said to be between the two.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 adds, “To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.” Paul here states that the Lord will come “with his saints” at the **parousia**, while the millennialists teach he will come “for his saints” at the **parousia** and “with his saints” at the **epiphaneia**. Such an interpretation would have the Lord coming “with his saints” seven years too early.

Are There Signs That Indicate The Second Coming of Christ Is Imminent?

It is quite common to hear radio and television preachers predict that the Lord is coming in the near future. Various signs are often offered as proof, such as

“wars,” “earthquakes,” and “civil upheavals” of all sorts. Many of them refer to Matthew 24 as a basis for their predictions.

A careful study of Matthew 24 reveals that Jesus answered two questions: (1) when shall these things (the destruction of Jerusalem) be (Mt. 24:1-3; Mk. 13:3; Lk. 21:7); (2) and the “end of the world.” The first question is dealt with in verses 4-34 and the second in verses 36–25:46. Therefore, the chapter is divided into two main sections. Those events described in the first 34 verses happen before that generation died. It is in this section that the “signs” generally alluded to by modern day prophets are listed. It is a mistake to apply these “signs” to the Second Coming of Christ or the end of the world, since Christ applied them to the destruction of Jerusalem. The signs by which they would know the end of Jerusalem had come are: (1) the gospel would have been preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Col. 1:13); (2) the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel (Mt. 24:15) is a reference to the encampment of the Holy City by the Roman armies; (3) the great tribulation (Mt. 24:21-29) is a reference to the great calamities that befell Jerusalem; (4) the darkening of the sun and moon and the stars falling (Mt. 24:29) is figurative language referring to the fall of nations or leaders, etc., here a reference to the fall of Jerusalem).

In verse 15, they are instructed that when they see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, they were to flee quickly into the mountains. If this is a reference to the end of time, what would fleeing into the mountains accomplish? How could they “escape quickly?” There will be no escaping the Second Coming of Christ!

In the second part of the chapter, where the end of the world is under consideration, the Lord is very indefinite as to time. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Mt. 24:36). If these are signs of His coming, how will His coming be “as a thief in the night” as He promised (1 Thess. 5:2; Mt. 24:43)?

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul comforts the brethren at Thessalonika regarding the dead in Christ. It is as though he anticipates that the next question they have will be “When will the Lord return?” Thus, beginning in 5:1, Paul addresses that theme. The phrase “the times and seasons” might well be translated “But concerning the date of the Lord’s coming and the characteristics of that period.” The words **chronos** (time) and **karios** (season) carry those meanings (Hogg and Vine 148).

The word translated “times” has primary reference to indefinite and extended periods of time; the word translated “seasons” has reference to a definite and particular span of time (cf. Neh. 10:34; 13:31; Dan. 2:21). The first seems to indicate time as such, while the second seems to denote periods of time which are distinguished by certain occurrences within them. The chronological idea is in the second (Kelcy 104).

Here, “times” refers to the length of the interval before the Parousia takes place, and the length of time it will occupy; “seasons” refers to the characteristics of the periods before, during, and after the Parousia (Hogg and Vine 149).

It is foolish for any man to think he knows or can calculate when Jesus will return. Those who set dates not only show their ignorance of Bible teaching, but leave themselves open to ridicule and embarrassment.

William Miller, who laid the foundation for Seventh Day Adventism with his date-setting, said:

I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for His coming. And I am fully convinced that sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come and all His saints with Him (361).

Charles Taze Russell, of Jehovah's Witness fame, said the Lord came to “the kingdom in 1914, but unseen to men.” He also stated that “from 1874 is the time of the Lord's second presence” (212).

“Joseph Smith announced that the Lord would return by the year 1891; again, however, his effort demonstrated the Mormon Church to be a “non-prophet” organization!” (Jackson 42).

Some in an attempt to prove that new testament writers believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent cite James 5:8 which reads “You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

The time of the Lord's return remains hidden to man. To seek to know that which cannot be known is a useless endeavor. There are no signs that will precede this event, nor do the Scriptures teach that it is imminent. If they do, they have been teaching that for almost 2000 years. The writers of the New Testament Scriptures knew no more about the time of the Lord's return than

we do. Since they did not know when he would come, they taught the people to live as if He would come at any moment. It is important for us to remember that those passages that warn us to be ready and look for the return of our Lord are designed to keep us ready at all times, not to indicate that the second coming is an imminent event. The fact that we do not know when the Lord will come does not cast doubt on the certainty of His coming.

Because the fact of His coming is so real, so certain, so sure of fulfillment, it is always "at hand." This is as true for us today as it was for those in the apostolic age. The Lord may come at any moment. David Lipscomb wrote,

No truth seems to have been more clearly and fully taught than that the Son of man would come when not looked for by the world. Yet there is no scriptural question upon which men bestow more attention, and no question that they seek more earnestly to determine. The time has often been set, and as often proved a mistake. Only by a righteous and pure life can one be ready for his coming. We should not only be ready for him, but should love his appearing and desire earnestly the day of his coming (63).

What Will Happen When Christ Returns?

The day of Christ's return will be the last day in history. The fact of His return cannot be denied. He promised to come again John 14:1-3. When he ascended to heaven two men in white announced His return Acts 1:9-11. The apostles preached His return Heb. 9:28. There are over 1800 references in the New Testament to the return of Christ. Time will be no more. There will be no more opportunities to make things right with God or our fellow man. Fences can no longer be mended nor can broken relationships be made right.

There will be a resurrection when Christ returns. In John 6:44 the scripture says that "No one can come to Me unless the father who sent Me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day." According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the dead will be raised when Christ returns. Both the righteous and wicked will be resurrected at the same hour John 5:28-29.

There will be a final judgment on this day. It is appointed by God (Heb. 9:27; Acts 17:30-31). Christ will be the judge (Acts 17:31). The Word of God will be the standard (Jn. 12:48; Rev. 20:11-15). All nations will be gathered

together (Mt. 25:31-46). Every person will be judged according to the deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10). The righteous will be welcomed into heaven, and the wicked will be condemned to the regions of the doomed (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 13:40-42) (Meadows 335).

Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

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BOOKNOTES

The Booknotes column will feature books recommended by journal editors. Booknotes will feature mostly newer titles and new releases which we believe our readers will find useful and interesting. Alongside these reviews we will include recommendations about older titles we have found useful in our studies and reading. Along with brief reviews of these books, we will also suggest a few places where these books might be found. Many books one might recommend are out of print, therefore, it is important to know how to find old, rare or out-of-print titles. Years ago this involved rummaging through old book stores (still a delightful way to spend a day for many of us), or using a book finding service. The task of locating one's book wants has become immeasurably easier since the advent of the Internet. It is a bibliophile's dream come true. There are numerous web-sites which search thousands of used bookstores. If you are on the trail of some elusive volume, the following sites are worth visiting:

- Bookfinder.com
- Alibris.com
- Abebooks.com
- Amazon.com

New books may be purchased at discount prices from CBD (Christian Book Distributors) at 1-800-247-4784. If there is a book that you have questions about- its content, its value, or its availability-send an email to **booknotes@cepsn.net** and we will try to see what we can find out about it. Also, we would be interested in any books you have read which you would like to recommend.

Please be advised that the CE does not recommend the words of any human writer as infallible, but our goal is to list books that, in general, present the truth on an issue. If we decide that a book should be listed because it presents some significant false doctrine, we will note that fact clearly in our short review. It is our hope that these books will assist our readers in mining the treasures to be found in God's infallible Word.

Apologetics

The Case for Christ, by Lee Strobel, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998) investigates whether there is credible evidence that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. Lee Strobel has a Master of Studies in Law degree from Yale Law School, and was an award-winning journalist and legal editor of the Chicago Tribune.

Today, this former spiritual skeptic is a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago. Using his skills as an investigative reporter and legal editor, Strobel cross-examines a dozen experts with doctorates from schools including Cambridge, Princeton and Brandeis.

He challenges these experts, all of whom are recognized authorities in their respective fields, with questions such as: How reliable is the New Testament? Does evidence for Jesus exist outside the Bible? Did Jesus-and Jesus alone-match the identity of the Messiah? Was the resurrection of Jesus an actual historical event?

Strobel's tough cross-examination style makes the book eminently readable. Although it reads like a captivating, fast-paced novel, *The Case for Christ* is an excellent scholarly introduction to the various disciplines that establish facts or the apologetics of what we Christians believe. These facts include: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he was raised from the dead, and that the New Testament is a reliable and accurate guide to the truth about history's most compelling figure. (Excellent introductory study, for high school students and older. CBD currently advertises it for \$8.99.)

Darwin on Trial, by Phillip E. Johnson, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991). This book shows that the theory of evolution is based, not on fact, but on faith-faith in philosophical naturalism. Phillip E. Johnson is a graduate of Harvard and the University of Chicago. He was a law clerk for Chief Justice Earl Warren and has taught law for over 35 years at the

University of California at Berkeley. At its publication, *Darwin on Trial* rocked the scientific establishment to its core. Johnson argues persuasively, courageously and with penetrating analysis that there simply is no body of empirical data supporting the theory of evolution. With the intrigue of a mystery and the gripping detail of a court trial, Johnson takes his readers through the evidence with a lawyer's skill. He is able to explain difficult scientific concepts in simple, clear, laymen's terms. His treatment of his subject is thorough and proceeds on an analytical, step-by-step basis. Michael Denton, author of **Evolution: A Theory in Crisis**, says of Johnson's book, "Unquestionably the best critique of Darwinism I have ever read."

In order to avoid confusion, readers should be aware that Phillip E. Johnson is not a creation scientist and neither is he a defender of creation science. Furthermore, he is not concerned in this book with addressing any conflicts between the Biblical accounts of creation and the scientific evidence. His purpose is to examine the scientific evidence on its own terms: "The question I want to investigate is whether Darwinism is based upon a fair assessment of the scientific evidence, or whether it is another kind of fundamentalism." Johnson's overarching point is that Darwinian evolution is not a fact but rather is a system built upon faith. It is "true" simply because scientists "believe" it is "true" and not because they have proved it to be so. In fact, he argues that the evidence clearly points in the opposite direction.

Therefore, if you are interested in a defense of scientific-creationism or a reconciliation of the Biblical accounts of creation with science, this book is not what you are looking for. But if you are interested in a persuasively argued examination of the theory of Darwinian evolution—one that exposes the bankrupt nature of the evidence to support such a false system—this book is a "must read." (Dense argumentation, although not highly technical. Suitable for the serious student. CBD currently advertises this book for \$9.99.)

