

# Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

## HOUSE CHURCH — VIRTUAL CHURCH

Bruce Stulting

Throughout the centuries, there have been many attacks on the structure of the Lord's church. These attacks have focused on the universal as well as the largest and smallest organized entity of the universal church—the church in any geographic location (the local church). Efforts have been made to restructure the worship, organization, the terms of entrance, the women's role in the assembly, and fellowship of the church. Currently, there is an attitude developing toward membership and the authority of the elders that, if followed to its logical conclusion, will cripple or destroy the local congregation. Some are beginning to deny the ability of elders to purge the local congregation of sin and/or regulate its membership. Others are claiming that it is possible to be a member of the Lord's church on the universal level, but not on a congregational level. In other words, they claim one can be a Christian and not be a member of any local congregation. Still others are contending that one can place membership in a church/congregation that is located in another city, state or even country from where they reside. It is suggested that such membership is made possible by using Skype (to be discussed later) via the Internet. The remainder of this article will discuss each of these new ideas regarding membership.

### ALL CHRISTIANS ARE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND MUST BE MEMBERS IN A LOCAL CONGREGATION

The New Testament speaks of the Lord's church in three ways. The word "church" is used in the universal sense

with reference to the saved everywhere (Mat. 16:16,18; Col. 1:18). It is used with reference to church/congregation in any geographic location (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Rev. chapters 1,2,3). It is also used with reference to assemblies of the local church convened for religious purposes (1 Cor. 11:18). The Lord wants us to be concerned about the church in whatever sense inspiration has used the term.

A casual reading of the New Testament will cause one to realize that the concept for church membership is taught. Likewise, one can see multiple reasons for being a faithful member of a faithful local congregation. It is easily understood that when one is scripturally baptized, the Lord by that act adds one to the church universal (Gal. 3:26, 27, ct. Acts 2:47). The church universal is essentially a relationship between God and the Christian. The "kingdom" or "church" in this respect has little organization beyond the fact that Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:22,23), nor, does it have any tangible features as such (Luke 17:20,21). As we shall see, the Scriptures teach that the Christian is to be a functional part of a local church/congregation.

Let us consider the fact of local churches/congregations as previously defined. While the Lord adds one to His church universal, one must place membership with a local church/congregation (Acts 9:26, 27). There are about 33 separate local churches mentioned in the New Testament. For instance, there was the local church at Philippi described as, "...to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phi. 1:1). The church

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# Contending FOR THE Faith™

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*CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH* is published monthly. P. O. Box 2357, Spring, Texas 77383-2357 Telephone: (281) 350-5516.

Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder  
August 3, 1917-October 10, 2001

## Editorial...

### Fellowship – Extensions And Limits

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

Any faithful child of God may fellowship any person that the faithful apostles would fellowship. In the above text of 1 John 1:7, John instructs us that fellowship is “**in the light.**” Fellowship, therefore, involves everyone who is “**in the light.**” As long as I “**walk in the light,**” I can fellowship all others who “**walk in the light.**” Such persons can have the same association and relationship with me that fellowship implies. I must not withhold fellowship from anyone who is “**in the light.**” On the other hand, I must withhold fellowship from everyone who has never been “**in the light**” or who has ceased to “**walk in the light.**” Hence, the importance and sobering seriousness of the subject of fellowship is truly evident.

#### The Meaning Of Fellowship

Our English word *fellowship* is the translation of the Greek word *koinonia*. It means sharing, communion, partnership, joint participation. *Koinonia* is translated by the following terms (one time for each term): *communication*, “contribution,” “distribution,” “to communicate.” It is translated *communion* in four places and *fellowship* in twelve places. *Koinoneo* is translated in one place “to be made partaker” and in another “distribute.” In four places it is translated “to be a partaker” and in two other places “communicate.” *Koinonos* is translated in one instance “companion” and in another “to have fellowship with.” In three places it is translated partner and in five other places “partaker.” Hence, we see the Holy Spirit’s use of this word family 38 times in the New Testament.

#### God’s Laws Of Inclusion And Exclusion

It must be understood that these two laws directly relate to man’s fellowship with God and man’s fellowship with man. *Not all unity is acceptable to God and not all division is sinful* (Mat. 10:34; 2 Cor. 6:17). The fellowship among men that is acceptable to God comes *only* when unity among men is accomplished by said men doing all things by the authority of Christ as revealed in the New Testament (Col. 3:17; Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Phi. 3:16; 1 Cor. 1:10).

Let us examine *God’s Law Of Inclusion*. Fellowship with God is attained when a believing, penitent person is baptized into Christ to obtain the remission of sins (Rom. 10:17; Mark 16:16; Acts 17:30; 2:38; Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27; Acts 2:47; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). When we speak of fellowship with God, we may liken it to a vertical line extended from man to God that illustrates the joint participation and association that has been made possible by man’s reconciliation to God

by his obedience to the Gospel (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Heb. 5:9; Rom. 10:16). Before said baptism, one is not in Christ where God has located salvation (2 Tim. 2:10; Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:26, 27). Hence, such a one continues to be guilty of sin and remains a child of the devil. Once this “vertical” fellowship with God exists, then and only then is one in a position to extend (or to receive as the case may be) fellowship with all others who are in fellowship with God. This fellowship that Christians enjoy with each other, we will call “horizontal” fellowship. Hence, Scriptural fellowship cannot be extended but from one faithful child of God to another. *Question:* In view of the foregoing, how could faithful children of God scripturally extend family privileges to those who are children of the devil??

Let us examine *God’s Law Of Exclusion*. When members of the Lord’s church sin, and they refuse to repent, they are subject to the proper corrective church discipline revealed in the New Testament. If they refuse to repent of their sinful beliefs and/or practices, then the church must withdraw her fellowship from them. This is the case because they are out of fellowship with God.

Having set out God’s laws of inclusion and exclusion, let us more closely examine what it means to “**walk in the light.**” In other words we want to know what the apostle John had in mind when he used the phrase “**walk in the light.**” Knowing that *things equal to the same thing are equal to each other* helps one understand clearly what John was thinking when he used the words “**walk in the light.**” With this principle in mind, please study Acts 2:42 along with 1 John 1:7. The verses read: “**And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers**” (Acts 2:42). “**But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin**” (1John 1:7).

Having read these two passages, please consider the following true/false statements for the purpose of establishing the meaning of the phrase under investigation.

1. T F It is possible to “**walk in the light**” and NOT continue “**stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.**”
2. T F It is possible to continue “**stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine**” and NOT “**walk in the light.**”
3. T F It is possible (from God’s point of view) to “**have fellowship one with another**” and not “**walk in the light.**”
4. T F It is possible (from God’s point of view) to “**have fellowship one with another**” and NOT continue “**stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.**”

Statements one and two are false. To “**walk in the light**” is to “**continue stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine**” and vice versa. Statements three and four are false. If, from God’s point of view, fellowship exists between people *only* when they are in fellowship with Him (and it is), statements

three and four must be FALSE. The conclusion is that to “**walk in the light**” is the exact same thing as continuing “**stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine**” (Acts 2:42).

Jesus said, “**I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life**” (John 8:12). To Christians, John wrote:

**That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth** (1 John 1:3-6).

As we notice the totality of the information from the two previous passages (keeping in mind our study of 1 John 1:7), we come to understand that fellowship is produced by man understanding and obeying God’s Will. This fellowship is with the Father. It is also with His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. One may claim fellowship with God, but in reality not have fellowship with Him. If one claims fellowship with God, but he keeps on walking in darkness, he is a liar, and does not the Truth. Scriptural fellowship exists only between faithful children of God. To have fellowship with God one must come into the light and continue to “**walk in the light.**” *My fellowship with other Christians is predicated on my coming into the light and continually walking in the light. Anyone else’s fellowship with me is contingent on my walking stedfastly in the light and that person doing the same.*

Thus, the faithful child of God’s fellowship is with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the apostles and prophets (men who wrote the New Testament) and with all other faithful children of God. This fellowship is always predicated on one’s being in the light and “**walking in the light.**” To walk in the light is to continue in the apostles’ teaching. To walk in darkness is to live contrary to the apostles’ teaching. All of us must take heed to persons who would have us reject: (1) the distinction between children of God and children of the devil; (2) the distinction between the Lord’s one true church and the religions of men; and (3) the difference between the faithful and the unfaithful children of God.

For some time now there has been a concerted effort by false teachers to bring into the fellowship of the saints those “believers” in Christ who are not in fellowship with Christ. They are doing it through the false doctrine called “unity in diversity.”

#### Unity *IN* Or Unity *AND* Diversity

“Unity in diversity” is a contradiction of terms. *Unity* is defined “oneness” and *diverse* means “unlike” (*Webster’s 9th New Collegiate Dictionary*). When the definition of these

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at Philippi came into existence when Lydia, the Jailer, and their respective families heard and obeyed the gospel (Acts 16:15,33). These 33 local churches/congregations consisted of Christians in a geographic area that had banded together as a local church/congregation. Since the church/congregation consists of individual members, we read of the church “unassembled” and also “gathered together” (Acts 14:27, 1 Cor. 11:18, 14:28). It should be obvious to the casual reader that these churches/congregations were not an optional matter, but were, in fact, an essential part and feature of New Testament Christianity.

It should be added that there is no authority for an organization larger or smaller than the local church/congregation. In other words, each congregation is autonomous (self governing). Thus, the eldership has no authority beyond the borders of the local church/congregation they oversee (Acts 20:28). Likewise, there is no authority for an entity to exist that is smaller than the local church/congregation. This would condemn the individual Christian who refused membership in a faithful congregation.

Let us consider the fact of placing membership in a local church/congregation. We have two occasions upon which Saul placed membership in a local church/congregation. It is usually the case that one becomes a member of the congregation where they are converted. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Saul became a member of the church at Damascus (Acts 9:10-22). After his conversion in Damascus he traveled to Jerusalem and “...he assayed to join himself to the disciples...” (Acts 9:26,27). The word “join” is translated from the Greek κολλάω. According to Thayer this word means “1) to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together; 2) to join or fasten firmly together; 3) to join one’s self to, cleave to.” This is descriptive of close, personal, and intimate relationships. Jesus used this word when describing the relationship and proximity of husband and wife (Mat. 19:9). κολλάω is simply defined as, “To glue or cement together, then, generally, to unite, to join firmly...” (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, by W. E. Vine). Thus, κολλάω is indicative of the importance and the nature of membership in the local church.

Because of Saul’s boldness in preaching Christ, the Grecians sought to kill him. When the brethren in Jerusalem discovered the plot against Saul’s life, they sent him through Caesarea to Tarsus (Acts 9:29,30).

**“Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”** (Acts 11:25,26).

The word “assembled” is translated from the Greek word συνάγω. According to Thayer (all following definitions are from Thayer), this word means, “2) to bring to-

gether, assemble, collect; 2a) to join together, join in one (those previously separated); 2b) to gather together by convoking; 2c) to be gathered, i.e. come together, gather, meet.” By “joining” or “assembling” oneself to a local church/congregation, one becomes an identifiable and contributing part of that assembly. From the foregoing, it is reasonable to assume that Saul “joined” himself to the church of Tarsus if one existed in that city. Otherwise, he himself and any other Christians with him would constitute the church in Tarsus. Thus, Saul was never without membership in a local church/congregation.

### IT IS GOD’S INTENT THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE MEMBERSHIP IN A LOCAL CHURCH/CONGREGATION

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Christians must be members of a local church/congregation. Other than Christ being head of the universal church, the local church/congregation is the largest governmental organization of which we read in the New Testament. Too many have adopted a “floating” policy where they go wandering around all over the place and never place membership in any local church/congregation. Thus, they never assume responsibility anywhere for anything. Christians who act like a bunch of “jumping fleas” hopping from one dog to another never helped build up anything. We are not talking about an occasional visit with brethren in other places. But we are concerned about those upon whom you can never depend, who will not take any assignment, will not be a permanent member of any congregation, and do not feel any sense of duty anywhere in

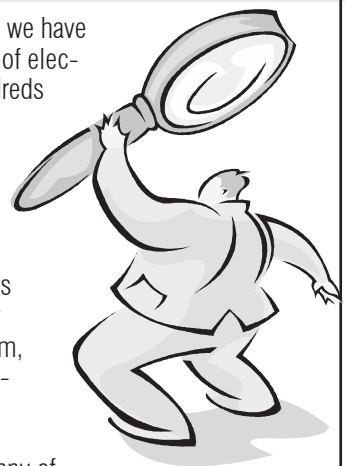
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particular and nowhere in general.

Membership in the local church is presupposed by the command to “**not forsake the assembling of ourselves together**” (Heb. 10: 25). The assembling was obviously the matter of “**come together in the church**”—more on this later (2 Cor. 11:18, cf. Acts 2:42). Some believe that they can justify the practice of just being a detached or free lance Christian, not being a member of any particular local church but visiting around. Notice again the language of Hebrews 10:25, “**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.**” The Hebrews writer is addressing specific people and a specific act—the practice of themselves coming together. This assembling together is not optional, nor is it without serious consequence if ignored (Heb. 10:25-31). In fact, the context indicates that to thus “forsake” is to “**...sin willfully**”; and the result of sinning willfully is “**...there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins**” (vs. 26).

Thus far, we have established Scriptural authority for: (1) the requirement of the local church/congregation; (2) the requirement of every Christian being a member of a local congregation; (3) and the sin and consequences of forsaking the assembly. Such is the nature of the New Testament church. We will now turn our attention to the errors mentioned in the introduction of this article.

### **SOME IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH/CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP**

We have already established that every Christian must be a member of a local church/congregation. There are two options available to the Christian: (1) locate and “join” oneself to a sound/faithful church/congregation in the area; or (2) if no such congregation exists, one must be established. This is the case since the faithful Christian constitutes the church wherever he/she is when no other exists as in the case of Saul in Tarsus as earlier mentioned, or where only an apostate church exists. Of the 33 congregations mentioned in the New Testament, some were located in the homes of some of the members e.g., the church that met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Where the church meets for assembly is a matter of expediency.

### **LEAVING A SOUND/FAITHFUL CONGREGATION IMPROPERLY**

Though it is becoming increasingly rare, there could be more than one sound/faithful congregation in close proximity to a Christian’s home. Since it is a matter of expediency, the Christian can choose which congregation he will “join.” Once the choice is made, the Christian’s support, devotion and loyalty is to the congregation where he is a member. However, he can offer fellowship to the other sound congregations in the area. Over the course of time, the Christian may determine that another sound congregation in the area is more suitable to his needs and talents. Since his membership is a matter of expediency, he has the liberty to move his

membership to that other congregation. It would be necessary to discuss this move with the leadership of both congregations before membership is transferred. All of this is done through expediency with the underlying authority of maintaining membership in a local church/congregation.

Any Scripturally sound action can be abused. One such abuse occurs when a Christian decides to remove his membership from a sound/faithful congregation for no legitimate reason. By “legitimate reason” we have in mind: (1) one who is moving from the area and distance would prohibit continued membership; (2) moving membership (as above) to another sound congregation in the area; and (3) for the purpose of establishing a congregation in another area where no sound congregation exists. All of these reasons are “legitimate” because they are authorized by direct statements, example and implication. In the above listed reasons, fellowship is maintained with the congregation that one leaves and is extended to the congregation which one joins.

It is becoming more and more common for Christians to remove their membership from a sound church/congregation for no good reason. They simply cease to attend at the local church/congregation and begin to worship at home. They have no intention of moving from the community or “joining” another congregation. Since there is no authority to establish a “new” congregation where a sound/faithful one already exists, they are not even left with that option. Such people become “members at large” which has already been proven sinful. Furthermore, by removing their membership in such a manner, they are in effect breaking fellowship with sound/faithful brethren. This is implied by their refusal to work and worship with the local church/congregation. A Christian commits sin by leaving a sound/faithful congregation in this manner and is subject to discipline that must not be ignored!

Is there authority for a *house church* or a *virtual church*? By *house church*, we mean a single eldership that exercises authority over more than one congregation (similar to that which was advocated by the Boston/Crossroad’s movement in the late 70’s and 80’s). By *virtual church*, we mean a situation in which a Christian attempts to “join” a congregation in another city, state, or even country. This Christian’s participation with said congregation would be limited to the Internet via programs such as Skype, phone calls, email and “snail” mail.

We have already determined that each congregation is autonomous and that elders have no authority beyond the membership of their own congregation. This being the case, there is no authority for the house church principle. No eldership can oversee the work of another congregation. The “house” churches have no right to exist apart from the local church/congregation. They must seek out and join a faithful church/congregation in their area. Or, if none are available, they must establish and function as the local church/congre-

gation in their own community.

Similar to the “house” church principle is the “virtual” church. For one to place membership over long distance (i.e., another city, state, country) ignores basic principles of worship, service, and fellowship. As we pointed out previously, the very meaning of the words “join” and “assemble” implies “gluing or fastening together” or “cleaving” to one another such as in a marriage. Could one be successfully married and perform all of the functions of matrimony if the couple were separated by 10’s, 100’s or 1000’s of miles with no intention of ever coming together in the same place? The obvious answer is, “NO!” How then could Christians ever perform all of the functions of membership in a congregation if they are separated by 10’s, 100’s or 1000’s of miles with no intention of ever coming together in the same place?

In First Corinthians chapter Eleven, Paul rebukes the brethren for their abuse of the Lord’s Supper. In this context, Paul uses several words/phrases to discuss the assembly of the Saints. Consider the following: (1) Come together from συνέρχομαι meaning: a) to come together a) to assemble; (2) Church from εκκλησία meaning: a) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly d) in a Christian sense, an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting. This **“coming together”** and/or **“assembling”** is to be done in **“one place”** (1 Cor. 11:20). In the case where one is a “long distance” member (10’s, 100’s or 1000’s of miles away), the only type of **“coming together”** is in a “virtual” assembly on the Internet thru such means as Skype (an Internet application allowing two-way video conferencing). However, such a situation could hardly be considered **“coming together”** in **“one place.”**

Furthermore, how could an eldership accept the oversight of such long distance members? There would be no way of knowing the spiritual condition of its flock. The elders must be **“among”** the flock and the flock must be **“among”** elders (1 Pet. 5:1,2). It would be difficult to imagine a shepherd having a flock of sheep in Jerusalem and Ephesus at that same time and caring for both equally well. There are many other problems with this arrangement, but these are sufficient to demonstrate that “house” churches and “virtual” churches are without authority and therefore, sinful. If this practice is carried to its logical conclusion, it would destroy the local congregation. *After all, if one person could place membership over a long distance, then everyone could.* This would result in one universal worldwide congregation.

Elders have the responsibility to maintain its membership! We have already established that placing membership with a particular congregation is a matter of expediency. As such, the final determination of all membership resides with the elders of the congregation or with the men of the congregation in the absence of elders. This is true, because the elders have the final authority in the area of expediency. Thus,

the eldership makes the final decision regarding accepting or rejecting one as a member of a local church/congregation. Simply desiring to “join” a “church/congregation” does not mean automatic acceptance.

Consider the case of Saul when he sought to “join” himself to the church at Jerusalem. At first, his membership was rejected (Acts 9:26). Here is an example of a faithful Christian being rejected for membership in a faithful congregation. Since membership in a local church/congregation is a matter of expediency, the leadership of the church in Jerusalem committed no sin. This is quite different from the attitude of Diotrephes who usurped the position of leadership in the church (3 John 9).

There are also circumstances that might call for the elders of a church/congregation to ask a faithful member to leave. Such was the case with Saul on at least two occasions. First, the brethren at Damascus sent Paul on his way when certain Jews sought to kill him (Acts 9:23-25). Likewise, the Jerusalem brethren also sent Saul on his way because Grecians threatened to kill him (Acts 9:29,30). Also, there could arise a disagreement over matters of judgment that are so great that it is necessary to separate. Such was the case with Paul and Barnabas regarding John Mark. **“And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other”** (Acts 15:39). If such matters of judgment can cause two brethren to separate, surely it can happen with a member of a congregation. When such contention over judgment arises, it is up to the elders to resolve the matter even if it means asking a member to depart.

Elders have a duty to purge the church of sin! There are some brethren who reject the concept of church discipline altogether. Others agree the church discipline is necessary, but fail to carry it out in a scriptural matter. Of the latter group, there are those who believe that we must mark, but not avoid those who are in sin and refuse to repent. They believe that we ought to encourage those from whom fellowship has been withdrawn to attend the various assemblies of the church. Let’s consider a few principles and see if this is a Scriptural practice.

*First*, we are to **“...mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them”** (Rom. 16:17). It is impossible to avoid someone sitting in the pew next to you. Furthermore, by being allowed to continue to assemble, they may **“...by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”** (Rom. 16:18).

*Second*, the fornicator in Corinth was to be **“taken away from among you”** (1 Cor. 5:2). This was necessary to purge out the leaven of sin from the congregation. Paul wrote, **“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump as ye are unleavened...”** (1 Cor. 5:6,7). We cannot purge out the old



leaven and be a new lump and at same time encourage the sinner to remain among us. The Israelites lost the battle of Ai because there was **“sin in the camp”** (Jos. 7).

*Third*, some brethren must be rejected because of the divisive nature of their sin. **“A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject”** (Tit. 3:10). Here we see the urgency necessary in dealing with some sinful brethren. Those who are causing division in the congregation must be rejected, which means shunned or avoided. Jesus warned, **“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves”** (Mat. 7:15). Should we disrobe the wolf and then invite him to the assembly for dinner? Surely, all can see the absurdity of this.

The elders have a sacred responsibility to protect the sheep. This includes isolating them from the sickening influence of sinners. Thus, elders must take the lead in marking and avoiding those in sin. They must also encourage the flock to avoid those who are so marked. Should the one withdrawn from come to the assemblies, we must **“...count**

**him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”** (2 The. 3:15).

## CONCLUSION

The organization of the church is critical to New Testament Christianity. We must respect all aspects of the church both universally and congregationally. It is imperative that we recognize the need to be a member of a local church/congregation. Likewise, we must respect the authority of the elders in the area of expediency.

Some of the foregoing errors are committed out of ignorance of the Scriptures. Others result from a failure to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15) or rebellion to God, His Word, and the authority that He has given the elders of the local church/congregation. Whatever the cause, the result is sin. We encourage all who are engaged in such practice, to reconsider their actions, search the Scriptures and repent of their sin. May this article encourage more study on these subjects.

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# CONFORMING TO GOD’S WORD

Raymond Wiseman

In the military, soldiers are expected to conform to the chain of command. There is an example of such conformity mentioned in the Scriptures. On an occasion when Jesus was in Capernaum, a centurion called on him to heal a servant who was **“... at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented”** (Mat. 8:5-7). When Jesus mentioned He would go to the centurion’s house to heal the servant, the centurion asked Him **“speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.”**

The centurion said, **“For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it”** (Mat. 8:7-9; cf. 1 Chr. 12:33, 38). Likewise, as soldiers of Christ, we have spiritual Commander to whose authority we must conform if we want to be pleasing to him (2 Tim. 2:4).

Joshua, a leader of Israel, was a man that conformed to the Word of God. God had commanded Moses to send out twelve men, one from every tribe to spy out the land of promise (Num. 13:1-2). After forty days the twelve returned and brought a report unto Israel. They said of the land, **“it floweth with milk and honey; ... Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities**

**are walled, and very great”** (Num. 13:27-29). Caleb and Joshua believed they could take the land with God’s help (Num. 13:30; 14:6-8). They tried to encourage the people to enter the land to take possession of it. The other ten spies declared they would not be able take the land and **“brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel”** (Num. 23:30-33). The evil report stirred the people and led them to rebel against the Lord. As a result they desired to return to Egypt from which God had freed them (Num. 14:1-4, 9). Because Joshua and Caleb conformed to God’s Word, only they, of the original adults that left Egypt, were permitted to enter into the land of promise.

By the time Israel had settled into the land, Joshua was growing very old in age. Although he had faced many battles and trials, his faith never wavered. However, Israel’s complacency had become evident to Joshua. Contrary to God’s command, the people had not driven out all the original inhabitants of the land. Israel seemed content to share the land. Summoning Israel’s elders, their heads, judges and officers (Jos. 23:1-2), Joshua confronted the compromisers. In that farewell speech, he reminded them about everything God had done in fulfilling his promises to them (23:3-5, 9-10;

24:1-13). Joshua challenged the people in what they were to do (Jos. 23:6-8, 11). He informed them of what God would do if they failed (Jos. 23:12-13, 16). The people said they would do as Joshua had encouraged (Jos. 24:24).

Joshua told the people to be **“very courageous to keep and to do all that are written in the book”** (Jos. 23: 6). According to Brown-Driver-Briggs’ lexicon, the word *courageous* means **“to be strong; to be firm.”** Thus, Joshua was telling the people that if they were to succeed, they needed to be spiritually strong in regard to obeying God’s Word. To the saints at Colossae, Paul revealed the key to walking worthy was to be spiritually strong (Col. 1:9-12). Such strength had to do with God’s written Word; and they were to demonstrate that strength through their obedience. Some people compromise God’s Word and, consequently, do not receive spiritual blessings. Thus, we should always strive to be numbered among God’s faithful. Being faithful in worship is one way to demonstrate conforming to God’s Word.

Israel was to demonstrate strength with God’s Word in worship (Jos. 23:7). Joshua cautioned the people to **“... come not among these nations ...”** (Jos. 23:7a). They were to keep themselves and their worship separate from the nations. Similarly, Paul wrote:

**Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean**

**thing; and I will receive you”** (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

Joshua also told Israel that the degree of separation was to **“... neither make mention of the name of their gods, ... neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: ...”** (Jos. 23:7b). To the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote that those who conform to God’s Word were to, **“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”** (Eph 5:11).

Those who worship improperly demonstrate a lack of spiritual development. Joshua told Israel to **“cleave unto the LORD your God”** (Jos. 23:8). According to Brown-Driver-Briggs’ lexicon the word *cleave* means to “cling” or “to stay with.” We **“cleave”** to God’s Word by adhering to it or conforming to it.

**Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him** (Heb. 2:1-3).

Let us always endeavor to conform to the Word of God.

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*When over the years certain brethren have labeled us “Witch Hunters” (inconsistent in their labeling though they be) they have done so with the full intention of placing us in a very bad light, but factually they have been correct—for over the years we have found no small number of witches among the saints.*

—David P. Brown

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(Continued From Page 3)

words are substituted for the words themselves, we have: “Oneness in unlikeness.” We may as well say “dryness in wetness” or “goodness in badness.” With these words taken in their normal definition and usage, then paired as we have them, they are nothing more or less than so much nonsense.

In the words “unity *and* diversity,” we are saying that God’s Word demands “oneness,” “unity,” and “sameness” in *obligatory matters*. By *obligatory matters* we mean those things authorized by God’s Word by the various kinds of direct statements, implication and/or examples (patterns) contained therein. The Bible authorizes in no other ways than the aforementioned ones. Thus, we must have Bible authority behind every thought, word, and action or we sin (Col. 3:17). In fact, whether we realize it or not, in our own communication with one another, direct statements, implications and/or examples (patterns) are the only means whereby any language communicates. In 1 Cor. 1:10 Paul said:

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

However, this same apostle had such a sharp difference with Barnabas (they were not of the same mind or judgment) over whether or not to take John Mark with them on their second preaching tour that they parted company (Acts 15:36-41). Is this the same Paul who wrote the Corinthian brethren and begged them not to divide, but to “**be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment**”? Did Paul preach one thing and practice something different? Was he a hypocrite? The answer is, OF COURSE NOT! Paul was begging the Corinthian brethren to be one in *matters of obligation*—those things bound upon them by the authority of the New Testament (Col. 3:17). Paul and Barnabas did not differ over *matters of obligation*, but over *optional matters* (different avenues, means, methods, ways) for discharging their obligations to God. From these options, God expected them to choose the option(s) that provided the greatest advantage for discharging their obligations to God. Please notice the following list.

- (1) Unless there is New Testament authorization, there is no obligation.
- (2) Where there is no obligation, there can be no options.
- (3) Without options, there can be no expeditious choice(s) available to man from which he may choose and whereby he can discharge his obligations to God.

In local church business the elders are to make the final decision in optional matters (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Elders, therefore, *must* know the difference in obligatory and optional matters. Elders *must* understand that in choosing which option(s) is best that they are seeking the option(s) that is most *expedient* in getting done *only* what

God in His authoritative Word has *obligated* the church to do. *To expedite anything is to discharge the obligation in the quickest and best way possible*. Hence, when we speak of “in the quickest and the best way possible,” we are speaking of *the element of advantage*. The *option* settled upon by the collective decision of the eldership does not *expedite* the discharging of the obligation *unless* there is the element of advantage inherent in the option(s) chosen.

Regarding the “**sharp contention**” that resulted in Paul and Barnabas parting company, there is no evidence that either one of these two great servants of God sinned in motive or action (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17; Gal. 5:6). In fact, after their separation the church in Antioch of Syria commended both of them in their work (Acts 15:40). Out of their disagreement over whether it was or was not the most expedient (advantageous) optional choice to take John Mark, two preaching tours emerged. *Hence, unity, oneness or sameness must exist in all matters of obligation AND diversity or difference is allowed or permitted in those matters where God did not specify who, where, when, how, etc. the thing authorized is to be done*. When elders do not understand these principles of ascertaining Bible authority, only confusion can result. We hasten to sadly say that the church today evidences that many elders have no idea, or at best they have a corrupted view, of the key area in which they function and how it affects the church. If the elders have very little or no idea of their sphere of operation and how to discharge it, what does the average member understand about the work of elders?

Today, those who advocate “unity *in* diversity” are trying to teach doctrines that are designed to treat obligatory matters as if they were optional. They teach that Christians can “opt” to observe the Lord’s Supper on Sunday, or “opt” to do so on any other day. If it violates one’s conscience, or if it is against your tradition to observe the Lord’s Supper on Thursday night, then do not do it, but do not divide the church over your differences. If you cannot use mechanical instruments of music in worship to God, that is fine! But just do not separate yourself from those who do. In fact, just about everything that God has obligated man to do has been dealt with in the above erroneous manner by *liberal false teachers*. The result is that false doctrines are taught which loose men from what God in the Bible has bound upon them (various forms of liberalism) while other false teachers have bound on men what God in His Word has not bound upon them (various forms of “anti-ism”). This is nothing more or less than the basic premise that undergirds and perpetuates denominationalism. There can be no God-approved unity, or true unity, or fellowship that is not founded on and sustained by Bible authority. We readily see the need of properly constituted authority in the everyday affairs of life. How much more so is such true and necessary in matters pertaining to our eternal destiny (John 12:48; 14:15)? To treat obligatory matters as optional, or vice versa, results in “a unity” as well as “a division” that is not authorized by the Bible.

We, therefore, find ourselves fellowshiping persons not in fellowship with God and vice versa. Hence, we see the tremendous importance of why men must learn and employ the principles of **“rightly dividing the word of truth”** or ascertaining Bible authority (2 Tim. 2:15; Col. 3:17).

### **Fellowship Or The Lack Of It Between Churches**

The churches under consideration are not human denominational churches. We are considering the Lord’s church. There are three usages of the word *church* in the New Testament. The word *church* is used by the Holy Spirit to refer to the one institution of the saved (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:47; 20:28; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; Col. 1:18). It is also employed to identify the largest and smallest organized entity of the one institution of the saved in any geographic location (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Rev. 1:4). Sometimes it is not so designated (Rom. 16:16). Finally the word *church* is used in an assembled sense—the church convened for religious purposes (1 Cor. 11:18, 20, 33; 14:19, 23, 26, 28). Of course, the word *church* in its assembled sense is referring to the “local” church assembling or coming together. The words *church* and *congregation* are synonymous. However, in the United States we have tended to use the word *congregation* when referring to a “local” church. We shall use both the words *church* and *congregation* in referring to the “local” church.

Each church in any geographic location is autonomous. By this is meant that each church runs its own affairs, with Christ as head, through the organizational structure for each church revealed on the pages of the New Testament (Phi. 1:1; Acts 10:32). As studied earlier, Christ has delegated to the elders (bishops, shepherds, presbyters) of each “local” church the authority to get done, in the quickest and best way possible, the work He has authorized (obligated) the church to do (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Again, we emphasize that the authorized fellowship existing between and among Christians is made possible **ONLY** by their faithful adherence to the doctrine of Christ (Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:17; 2 John 9-11; Col. 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:6—*ASV*, 1901; 1 John 1:7).

The first church of Christ on the earth was the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2). All others came into existence after it. Was the Lord’s church in Jerusalem authorized by the Scriptures to extend the fellowship enjoyed between its members to other churches such as the church in Antioch of Syria (Acts 13:1)? May one church extend fellowship to another church without giving up its own autonomy or usurping the autonomy of the other? If so, where is the New Testament authority for such?

Any fellowship between churches **MUST** respect and adhere to the authorized organizational structure of each church as revealed in the New Testament (Col. 3:17). Therefore, one church’s elders cannot dictate and control another churches elders and, thereby, rule said church. Under the authority of Christ exercised through the teaching of the New

Testament, each eldership sets the policy of the church they oversee or superintend. Please consider the following example. Church “A” has been in existence for 30 years. In a neighboring community, there is no church. Over the years the few Christians that have been in the town have had their membership with congregations in nearby communities. In time, through conversions and faithful brethren moving into said town, the Christians residing in the area decide to form a congregation according to the New Testament pattern. This they do. We shall call it church “B.” Is church “A” authorized by the New Testament to extend fellowship to church “B” and vice versa, because each church is walking in the light of God’s Truth (1 John 1:7; John 8:31, 32; 17:17)? By this it is meant that churches “A” and “B” are continuing **“stedfastly in the apostles doctrine”** (Acts 2:42). Both churches are abiding in **“the doctrine of Christ,”**; thereby they have **“both the Father and the Son”** (2 John 9). Each one is practicing the principles implied by the direct statement of Colossians 3:17.

It is obvious that it is impossible for Christians in different congregations to have the close, intimate fellowship with one another that Christians of the same congregation enjoy. They are separated by the autonomous structure of the church, and thus, lack close personal association and involvement with each other. Also, the expeditious efforts determined by the elders of each congregation in discharging the obligations for which God holds the church responsible vary from church to church. Hence, it is impossible for Christians who submit to the elders of the church in which they are members to be as involved in the works of another church with a different work program set out by a different eldership. Does this mean that there is no fellowship between members of different congregations? **ABSOLUTELY NOT.** All this means is that Christians **MUST** respect and abide by the New Testament teaching concerning the organization and autonomy of the church. Does this rule our cooperation (fellowship) between autonomous congregations? Of course not. If one Christian can assist another Christian in doing what the Bible designates to be the responsibility of each Christian that is peculiar to and done **ONLY** because one is a Christian, a congregation (a multiplicity of Christians organized according to the New Testament pattern) may do the same. Please study the following Scriptures regarding this matter (Col. 3:17; Acts 2:42; Phi. 1:5; 4:16,18; Rom. 15:30,31; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:18, 19, 23, 24; 9:1-15; Jam. 1:27).

When fellowship is extended from one church to another, for the Scriptural reasons already noted, is it a “once in fellowship, always in fellowship” relationship regardless of the false doctrine one of the churches may come to believe, practice, and propagate? Remember the *only* reason that fellowship can exist between congregations in the first place is that each congregation (the persons comprising said churches) were first of all in fellowship with God by their

faithful obedience to the Gospel and their faithful adherence to God's Word. If such had not been the case, a faithful church would never have had the biblical authority to extend said fellowship in the first place (Col. 3:17). The biblical rule or principle that authorizes individual Christians within a church to fellowship each other is the same rule that allows sister congregations to be in or out of fellowship with another. *Again, we affirm that what is done by a Christian that is peculiar to and done only because one is a Christian is that which may be done by a congregation of Christians.*

*Would someone attempt to prove from the Scriptures how the organizational structure of the church makes null and void the New Testament principles regarding fellowship?* If so, I suppose that the church of which I am a member continues to be in fellowship with the Independent Christian Church. After all, "they used to be us and we used to be them." The passing of time has no bearing on any principle of truth. If, therefore, it is a sin for one church to disfellowship another church, then the implication is that the church of which I am a member continues to be in fellowship with the Independent Christian Churches. Faithful persons cannot be in fellowship with unfaithful persons whether individually or collectively. If faithful church "A" (a multiplicity of members of the body of Christ) that is faithful to God, may remain in fellowship with unfaithful church "B" (a multiplicity of members of the body of Christ) that is unfaithful to God, just where is the New Testament authority for doing so? In discharging their responsibilities to those they superintend, faithful elders must lead, guide, and direct the church concerning who is in fellowship with God and who is not. We would think a shepherd wise who would isolate a sick sheep from his own flock lest they become infected by its disease. Would we call that same shepherd wise if he knew that another shepherd's flock was spiritually sick, but having no jurisdiction over his fellow shepherd's flock, he concluded that he must do nothing to keep his sheep away from the sick flock?

The organizational structure of the one universal church into autonomous churches in various geographic locations with a plurality of elders over each church does not nullify the teaching of the New Testament concerning the extending or withdrawing of fellowship. *That which implies a false doctrine is itself false.* Truth implies truth. Hence, to teach that church "A" sins if it withdraws the fellowship it once extended to church "B" because said church was faithful to God is to teach a principle that permits the faithful to fellowship the unfaithful. By implication such a view is affirming that faithful church "A" is forever in fellowship with church "B" regardless of what church "B" believes or practices! In other words, church "A" may extend fellowship to church "B" solely on the basis that church "B" is faithful to God, but church "A" may not withdraw fellowship from church "B" because church "B" has become unfaithful to God. Who can believe such a thing?

The next logical question would be, how does one know that a congregation is out of fellowship with God? The answer is, when a congregation with or without deliberate purpose or forethought engages and willfully persists in anything that is contrary to the doctrine of Christ (loosing men from what God has bound upon them or binding on them what God does not), said congregation does not have God in the doing of it (2 John 9-11). When those who set the policy of the church (the elders, or where there are no elders, the men) deliberately with willful forethought or not guide the church they oversee into unauthorized acts, they sin in so doing and cause those who follow their false policies also to sin. If they refuse to be corrected by the Bible, they are not fit for fellowship with God, nor, therefore, His faithful people. Such is made clear by our Lord's letters to the seven churches of Asia and Paul's letter to the Corinthians (Rev. chapters 2, 3). Paul commanded, "**A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject**" (Tit. 3:10). Would someone please attempt to explain why this would not apply to a plurality of heretical elders or the people under their oversight? It makes no difference whether the members are in agreement with them or not. Some people do not have enough spiritual concern for what is right and wrong to fill a germ's thimble, and thus, they just go right along with whatever the elders (ear tickling preachers) feed them.

Someone may say, "We have no example in the New Testament of one church withdrawing fellowship from a sister congregation; therefore, we are not authorized to do such." *An example is not the only way the Scriptures authorize!* Thus, there is no merit whatsoever to such an argument. Remember, the Scriptures not only authorize by example, but also by direct statements and implication. That which proves too much proves nothing. The Bible nowhere teaches anything that would authorize an individual Christian or a scripturally organized multiplicity of individual Christians (a local church) to be in fellowship with an unfaithful child of God, or an organized, or unorganized multiplicity of unfaithful children of God—a local church. If someone thinks otherwise, show us the Scripture that directly says it, implies it and/or is an example of it.

For those who are still not convinced that one church may withdraw fellowship from a church to which they have extended fellowship, please consider the following situa-

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tion. We know of at least three church buildings that house at least two congregations in each building. In each one of the buildings there is one Anglo congregation and one Hispanic congregation. The only connection that the Anglo churches have with the Hispanic churches is that the Anglo churches support the Hispanic preachers and own the buildings where they meet. If one of these churches in the same building begins to teach a false doctrine, and neither one can withdraw fellowship from the other, then they both could remain in the exact same relationship they had when both believed and practiced the same thing. Knowing that we must have Biblical authority for everything that we believe or practice (Col. 3:17); and certain brethren believe one church may not

withdraw fellowship from another church, just how would the faithful brethren in this case scripturally deal with the unfaithful brethren? Remember, that which implies a false doctrine is itself false. In other words, that which is true cannot imply that which is false.

### Conclusion

Faithful children of God may fellowship anyone that the faithful apostles fellowshiped. But they may not (there is no New Testament authorization) fellowship anyone that the faithful apostles would not fellowship (2 Thess. 3:6).

—Editor



# Some Thoughts On Benevolence

Lynn Parker

The church has a responsibility to help the less fortunate, the sick, and the widows, and generally, those who cannot help themselves (Gal. 6:10; James 1:27). As we consider the benevolent aid we might render to those in need, there are several Bible principles and points that we should keep in mind.

*First*, the duty to care for one in need falls to the physical family. **“But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever”** (1 Tim. 5:8). It is true that brethren are all to care for each other. It is also the case that if families do not take care of their various members, soon the evangelistic efforts of the church will suffer. Paul went on to write, **“If any woman that believeth hath widows, let her relieve them, and let not the church be burdened; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed”** (1 Tim. 5:16). If family is available, and can perform the care of the suffering, they are to do it and **“and let not the church be burdened.”** Some families are too lazy to care for their own. In such a case, they have denied the faith of our Lord Jesus and are **“worse than an unbeliever.”** If a family complains that one of their own has been neglected by the church, then certainly the church can inquire as to what the family is doing to care for this needy relative.

*Secondly*, some should be appointed to take care of the needy and others need to continue in teaching the word. Not every member of every congregation should, or needs to, be responsible for the care of the needy. A need arose in the first century church, and with the need, murmuring also arose in the church. Here’s the account:

**And in those days, when the number of the disciples was**

**multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word** (Acts 6:1-4).

The facts are clear and there need be no misunderstanding. Note these carefully.

(1) Widows were being neglected.

(2) The apostles called the brethren together and instructed that godly, diligent men be selected for appointment to see to the needs of the widows.

(3) It was not proper that the apostles should forsake the evangelistic duties before them to see to these needs.

Clearly not every person in the congregation needs to be appointed to take care of benevolent needs. To argue the point is to miss the principle of Scripture. Because not every member is caring for the needy does not necessarily mean that the needy are being neglected or the members are unkind. It may simply mean that as far as one can humanly know, the needs are being met through the efforts of certain ones in the congregation.

*Thirdly*, those in need have duties as well. The Bible teaches that we sin when we know to do good and fail to do it (Jam. 4:17). Still, I cannot help where I do not know of need. It comes with poor manners on the part of the sick to cry, “I’m being neglected!” when this person has not made

known his/her needs to others. Some folks never make plain their needs, then complain when other folks do not tend to them. Then sometimes people are just wrapped up in themselves and look for reason to complain. I have noticed, after more than 30 years of preaching, that many of the ones hollering the loudest are often absent when it comes to care of others. In other words, they want the attention of the brethren but do pitifully little when it comes to helping others.

Those in need can be longsuffering, too. It amazes us to hear that one can become so disgruntled with the brethren over perceived injustices that he/she leaves the congregation in a huff. Why? Because the brethren, in the mind of this disgruntled member, did not do enough to help. In any congregation, brethren can falter. Brethren are human, and sometimes mistakes are made. But is it not unreasonable to say, "I'm leaving because they did not do enough for me" and in so doing display a lack of forbearance, love, and longsuffering? **"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil"** (1 Cor. 13:4-5). Can we calmly ask the brethren to see to a need that is not being met? It is like the brother who, after the worship assembly ends, makes a quick beeline to his car and then fumes, "No one spoke to me!" Such an attitude will never find happiness in the church.

The needy have a duty to help themselves as much as possible. The Bible teaches that we are to be productive citizens of the kingdom of Christ.

**For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we**

**eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all,...** (2 The. 3:7-10).

The Bible cautions against idleness (1 Tim. 5:11). Surely there are situations where brethren are so ill or destitute that they are limited in what they can do for others, and are themselves in need of care. But when this infirmed brother or sister can, he/she has a duty to be a help to others, and not be a burden. If we are not wise, we can unwittingly encourage slothfulness and laziness. We see a society that is increasingly becoming a "welfare state" with a large contingent of Americans unwilling to work and more than willing to be supported by the work of others. Never let such a sad, tragic state prevail in the church. Some brethren have done more harm than good in rushing to give out money or other aid without knowing all the facts. Christians are to be as productive as they can so that their labor can bless those truly in need (Eph. 4:28; Acts 20:35).

#### Conclusion

Here we offer these points in a spirit of love for study and consideration. Absolutely we must see to the needs of those in genuine need as we have opportunity and ability. God also expects us to recognize certain principles that govern benevolent aid to those in need.

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## FELLOWSHIP AND THE WORD "LIGHT"

Charles Pogue

A few days ago, I was made aware of a person who made the following argument in defense of ignoring God's law of church discipline: **"If a person is in fellowship with God, I must also fellowship him, and I cannot truly know if said person is or is not in fellowship with God."** The implication, of course, is that neither an individual nor a congregation could ever withdraw fellowship from anyone. There is one five letter word that if one studies what the New Testament has to say about it, completely answers this frail and futile claim. It is the word "light."

The apostle John wrote: **"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"** (John 8:12). Hold a mental finger at that verse, while we note a few other verses, including an earlier one recording these words of the Lord, **"But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be manifest, that they are wrought in God"** (John 3:21). Now hear the exhortation of Paul to the Ephesian brethren. **"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light"** (Eph. 5:8). Finally, the Apostle

John wrote the familiar words, **“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7). Now let us notice a few things from these verses. We can know truth, because coming to the light is accomplished by doing truth. We can distinguish light from darkness, because it is possible for us to walk as children of light. Whether one is speaking in regards to one’s fellowship with God, or one’s fellowship with another human being, that fellowship is based upon **“walking in the light.”** Between man and God, the requirement to walk in the light is incumbent upon man not God, because God is light, and in Him there is no darkness. Since God is light, it would be senseless to say that God must walk in the light to have fellowship with man since God is light. It would be nonsensical to impose upon God the requirement to walk in Himself. If a man, though, can and in fact, must, walk in the light to have fellowship with God, it is self-evident that that individual can know what constitutes light. By the same token, it is implied that he can also know what is not light and constitutes darkness. Not only is it true that the person can distinguish between light and darkness, he can also know whether he is walking in light or darkness. Now, if these things are true, it must also follow that a person can know, by learning what another person believes and practices, whether that person is walking in light or darkness. The conclusion, then, is that one can know whether another person is in fellowship with God, and if he is, that person not only may, but must, be fellowshiped: if that individual is not in fellowship with God, he not only may not, but must not, be fellowshiped. If these statements or not true, where are they not true?

Now, what if a brother is not walking in the light? What is the obligation of faithful brethren toward him? These are questions of a most serious nature, in so much as light has no communion with darkness (2 Cor. 6:14). Paul exhorted the faithful in the churches of Galatia to restore those who were overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1, 2). It is an a posteriori conclusion that a person who is overtaken in a fault, is walking in darkness. Thus, a brother who is not in darkness has an obligation to restore one who is in darkness, and not light. By restoration to the light, the one who is in sin has been rescued from death (Jam. 5:20). But there is also another side to the situation. If a faithful brother sees another brother in sin, and does not take action, he will answer to God for his neglect. We know this is true, because we are commanded to withdraw ourselves from every brother who walketh disorderly (2 The. 3:6). If we fail to correct those who are in sin, the incessant command of Ezekiel 3:18, with its attendant warning to the watchman to warn the wicked or have the blood of the wicked on his hands, is applicable. Thus, if one sees a brother in sin and does nothing, or if a congregation fails to practice first instructive, and that failing, corrective, discipline, more than one soul is in jeopardy.

Those who argue that one cannot know if a brother is in fellowship with God or not, and therefore, cannot withhold fellowship from an erring brother, is guilty of a red herring argument, purposely making the faithful to look like the bad guys, while the guilty party goes free. If we can know the truth, and if we know what another person believes or teaches, we can know whether said person is in light or darkness doctrinally. If one knows the manner of life, and religious practices authorized by God, and knows how another person lives, or what his religious practices are, then one can know if said person is in the light or in darkness in his manner of life and religious practice. It follows then, that one can know whether another person is in fellowship with God or not.

Just because we can know whether an individual is in fellowship with God, it does not necessarily follow that we do know. Is it our responsibility to know? It is if we are concerned about one another’s eternal well-being! That does not suggest, nor does it demand, prying. By knowing one another, by our studying together, by our spending time with one another, we can, and most assuredly will, know one another well enough to know if we are walking in the light as we should, or if we are walking in darkness. The argument that we cannot know whether one is in fellowship with God or not is usually made to cover up a glaring fault. One who is in fellowship with those who are out of fellowship with God, and yet wish to retain that fellowship without taking the corrective measures that God requires, make this argument. Are they all the while unaware that they too are walking in darkness rather than light?

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# 2010 SPRING CHURCH OF CHRIST *CFTF* LECTURES

## “Profiles In Apostasy #2”

FEBRUARY 27—MARCH 2, 2011

David P. Brown, Director

### SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27

9:30 AM **David P. Brown:** *The Holy Spirit Makes No Earthly Sense* by Terry Rush

10:30 AM **Lester Kamp:** *Theology Simplified* by Lonzo Pribble

#### NOON MEAL PROVIDED BY THE SPRING CONGREGATION

2:00 PM **Terry Hightower:** *The Battle Over Hermeneutics in the Stone-Camp. Mvmt., 1800-1870*, Eds. Casey & Foster

3:00 PM: **Paul Vaughn:** *One Ch.: A Bicentennial Celebration of Campbell's Dec. & Ad.*, Eds. Carson, Foster, & Holloway

4:00 PM **John West:** *Seeing the Unseen* by Joe Beam

### MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28

9:00 AM **Skip Francis:** *A Gathered People: Revisioning the Assembly...* by Hicks, Melton, & Valentine

10:00 AM **Gene Hill:** *The New Testament Church Contrasted* with the book, *A Gathered People...* by Hicks, et al.

\*10:00 AM **Linda Pogue:** An Expose of Selected Chaps. from *Trusting Women...* ed. Scilvey

11:00AM **Bruce Stulting:** *A Church that Flies: New Call to Restoration in the Churches of Christ* by Woodroof

#### LUNCH BREAK

1:30 PM **Brad Green:** *The Forgotten Treasure* by Gary D. Collier

2:30 PM **Roelf Ruffner:** *The Church In Transition* by James S. Woodroof, 1991

3:30 PM **OPEN FORUM:**

#### DINNER BREAK

6:30 PM CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

7:00 PM **Danny Douglas:** *The Power Within* by Jesse E. Fonville

### TUESDAY, MARCH 1

9:00 AM **Don Tarbet:** *The Cultural Church*, by F. LaGard Smith

10:00 AM **Johnny Oxendine:** *Renewal For Missions* by Helsabeck, Jr. (Christian Ch.), Holloway, & Foster

\*10:00 AM **Linda Pogue:** An Expose of Selected Chaps. from “*Trusting Women...*”, ed. Scilvey (Part 2)

11:00 AM **Michael Hatcher:** *The Second Incarnation* by Rubel Shelly & Randall J. Harris

#### LUNCH BREAK

1:30 PM **Doug Post:** *In Search of Wonder* by Lynn Anderson

2:30 PM **Wayne Blake:** *Is Christ Divided?: A Study of Sectarianism* by Monroe Hawley

3:30 PM **OPEN FORUM**

#### DINNER BREAK

6:30 PM CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

7:00 PM **Daniel Denham:** *The Holy Spirit: Center of Controversy—Basis of Unity* by Mac Deaver

### WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2

9:00 AM **John Rose:** *Together Again* by Rick Atchley and Bob Russell (Christian Church)

10:00 AM **Jimmy Gribble:** *Navigating the Winds of Change* by Lynn Anderson

11:00 AM **Charles Pogue:** *The Churches of Christ* by Richard T. Hughes

#### LUNCH BREAK

1:30 PM **Ken Chumbley:** *American Origins of Churches of Christ* by Richard T. Hughes

2:30 PM **Jess Whitlock:** *Discovering Our Roots*, by C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes

3:30 PM **OPEN FORUM**

#### DINNER BREAK

6:30 PM CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

7:00 PM **Dub McClish:** *Illusions of Innocence* by C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes

\* LADIES ONLY

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## Directory of Churches...

### -Alabama-

**Holly Pond**—Church of Christ, 10221 Hwy 278 W., P.O. Box 131, Holly Pond, AL 35083, Sun. 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 6:30 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m., (256) 507-1776, (256) 507-1778.

### -Colorado-

**Denver**—Piedmont Church of Christ, 1602 S. Parker Rd. Ste. 109, Denver, CO 80231, Sunday: 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. www.piedmontcoc.net, Lester Kamp, evangelist. (720) 535-5807.

### -England-

**Cambridgeshire**—Cambridgeshire—Cambridge City Church of Christ, meeting at The Manor Community College, Arbury Rd., Cambridge, CB4 2JF. Sun., Bible Study--10:30 a.m., Worship-- 11:30 a.m.; Tue. Bible Study--7:30 p.m. www.CambridgeCityCoC.org.uk. Keith Sisman, Gospel Preacher. Contacts: Keith Sisman [From USA, Toll Free: (281) 475-8247]; By phone inside the U.K.: Cambridge (England): 01223-911243]; Alternative Cambridge contacts: Joan Moulton - 01223-210101; Matt. Shouey (Lakenheath) - 01638-531268. Postal/ mailing Address - PO BOX 1, Ramsey Huntingdon, PE26 2YZ United Kingdom

### -Florida-

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

**Pensacola**—Bellview Church of Christ, 4850 Saufley Field Road, Pensacola, FL 32526, Sun. 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m. Michael Hatcher, evangelist, (850) 455-7595.

**Pensacola**—Eastgate Church of Christ, 2809 E. Creighton Rd., {ensacp;a. F; 32504, Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m. Tim Cozad, evangelist, (850) 477-4910

### -North Carolina-

**Rocky Mount**—Scheffield Drive Church of Christ, 3309 Scheffield Dr., Rocky Mount, NC 27802 (252) 937-7997.

### -South Carolina-

**Belvedere (Greater Augusta, Georgia Area)**—Church of Christ, 535 Clearwater Road, Belvedere, SC 29841, www.belvederechurchofchrist.org; e-mail belvecoc@gmail.com, (803) 442-6388, Sun.: 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m., Evangelist: Ken Chumbley (803) 279-8663.

### -Oklahoma-

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

### -Texas-

**Denton area**—Northpoint Church of Christ, 5101 E. University Dr. (Greenbelt Business Park). Mailing address: Northpoint Church of Christ, Greenbelt Business Park, 5101 E. University Dr., Box 6, Denton, TX 76208. E-mail: northpointcoc@hotmail.com. Sunday: 9:30, 10:30, 1:00; Wednesday 7:00. Contact: Dub McClish: 940.387.1429; tgjoriginal@verizon.net. www.northpointcoc.com

**Evant**—Evant Church of Christ, 310 West Brooks Drive, Evant, TX 76525. Office: (254) 471-5705; Jess Whitlock, evangelist (254) 471-5717.

**Houston area**—Spring Church of Christ, 1327 Spring Cypress, P.O. Box 39, Spring, TX 77383, (281) 353-2707. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:30 p.m., David P. Brown, evangelist. Home of the Spring Contending for the Faith Lectures beginning the last Sunday in February. www.churchesofchrist.com.

**Huntsville**—1380 Fish Hatchery Rd. Huntsville, TX 77320. Sun. 9 a. m., 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (936) 438-8202.

**New Braunfels**—225 Saenger Halle Rd. Sun: 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. Wed. 7:30 p.m. Lynn Parker, evangelist. (830) 625-9367. www.nbchurchofchrist.com.

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