



CHURCH DISCIPLINE

By Edgar J. Dye

**THE
BIBLE
WORKSHOP**

A STUDY OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Edgar J. Dye

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Lesson #1

I. INTRODUCTION

1. A word of advice and caution from J.D. Tant, Ancient Landmarks, Vol. XI, No. 4, April, 1976 is in order to start: "It is no accident that we are depicted as 'the family of God.' We are spiritually brothers and sisters in the household of God, sharing 'the father of Spirits' and an elder brother. This is no superficial relationship of people who get together on Sundays for a good time. God decreed that these ties of the spirit family are deeper even than the cherished, but fleshly, parent-child relationship (Mt. 10:34-39). But in order to have such family solidarity, there must be discipline. To have the unifying love at the expense of purity in faith an life is an exercise in self-destruction. The forces of love and discipline are not mutually antagonistic, but are rather complementary. When you think of the environment of the physical family, you understand that where either of these elements is missing you have a flawed structure. So it is with the Lord's family -- the church.

"But we have extremists on two fronts who seemingly stress one almost to the exclusion of the other. Some cry for love, tolerance, fellowship and brotherhood, stressing unity no matter how deviant in life or doctrine one may become. On the other hand are the professional purifiers who go from place to place and person to person seeking witches whom they may condemn to the flames ignited within their own crucibles of self-righteous indignation. 'Party-line-pronouncements' thus become the standard of measurement. Must we have one without the other? We encourage parents to strike a happy balance within the family sphere so that firm discipline and loving acceptance can work together in bringing children to fruitful maturity. That fruitful maturity is the same goal we have for the spiritual man, and the Bible teaches the same recipe of firm discipline coupled with loving obedience.

"In fact, these two cannot properly exist without one another. Separation, discipline, is good and proper, but when it is separated from the motivation of love, it deteriorates into the works of true flesh -- 'factions, divisions, parties.' And while unity is most desired, there is that which is worse than division -- unity and compromise with error either in faith or morals. Balance is needed, and God's word certainly gives the formula for success."

2. Two extremes are encountered in the matter of church discipline: 1. misuse (abuse), and 2. non-use (abandonment). We must avoid both like the plague.

3. "Some brethren have an attitude toward sin in the congregation about like the woman who was so 'patient' with her little boy she let him run the visiting preacher out of two chairs and throw a fit when he didn't move from the third. Such 'looking in the other direction' does about as much good as ignoring cancer and hoping it will go away." -Keith Sharp
4. If we had the faith and the moral courage (backbone) to stand against sin in the church and uphold the preaching of church discipline, many more would "fear," and in that fear, return to the Lord. For preaching, practicing and applying God's word will produce fear in the hearts of all who are desirous of doing his will (Ac. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:20).
5. In all matters of faith, church discipline included, we must recognize the Bible as the one and only complete guide for serving God. We have no right to either add to it or take from it; nor do we have the right to either ignore or reject any N.T. directive.
6. Given enough time (Heb. 5:12) we should learn and grow to enough spiritual maturity to take our stand on church discipline as we have on baptism for the remission of sins, etc.
7. We strive to do this because of a love of truth and righteousness and because of the alternative if we don't have this attitude and determination (2 Jn. 9).
8. Remember, man lives "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," (Mt. 4:4; cf. Ac. 20:26,27). This includes teaching on church discipline.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. WE BEGIN WITH THE FACT THAT DISCIPLINE, EVEN CHURCH DISCIPLINE, IS A N.T. DOCTRINE, A COMMAND OF GOD (Mt. 18:15-17; Rom. 16:17,18; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Eph. 5:11; 1 Th. 5:14; 2 Th. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:17-20; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Tit. 1:9-11; 3:10,11; 2 Jn. 9-11).
 1. These scriptures leave no doubt about it.
 2. A church which refuses to accept these divine directives, or which, through neglect, fails to practice what they require is rebelling against the revealed will of God.
 3. Surely we know the seriousness of the sin of rebellion (1 Sam.15:22,23).

Lesson #2

- B. GOD'S REQUIREMENT OF DISCIPLINE AND DEALING WITH THE DISOBEDIENT IN THE PAST. (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11)
1. From Adam to Moses, during the age of promise.
 - a. From Adam to Moses, during the age of promise.
 - 1) First, God instructed them in what to do and what not to do, and what would happen if they disobeyed (Gen. 2:15-17).
 - a) This is "preventive discipline" for it is "instruction or training which molds, strengthens or perfects."
 - 2) When they disobeyed, God exercised "corrective discipline," (Gen. 3).
 - b. Next, the wicked world of Noah's time upon whom God exercised severe measures (Gen. 6:1-13; 7:21-23; cf. 1 Pet. 3:18-20).
 - c. Nadab and Abihu is another case (Lev. 10).
 - d. The wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah furnish us with another example (Gen. 18, 19).
 - e. Even Lot's wife is a case in point (Gen. 19:12-17, 26; cf. Lk. 17:32).
 2. From Moses to Jesus Christ, during the time of the Mosaic Law.
 - a. The spies and Israel's 40 year sentence (Num. 13; 14; cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-12; Heb. 3).
 - b. The Sabbath breaker (Num. 15:32-41).
 - c. Moses' disobedience (Num. 20:7-12).
 - d. Israel, Achan, Jericho, and Ai (Josh. 6, 7).
 - e. The young prophet of 1 Kings 13 who disobeyed after rendering a faithful and courageous service to God.
 3. In apostolic times under the gospel, during the age of consummation and fulfillment in Christ.
 - a. Ananias and Sapphira, their sins: covetousness, greed, and lying -- reveal that God still requires discipline (Ac. 5:1-11).
 - b. Corinth and the fornicator (1 Cor. 5).
 - c. The Lord's commendation of the church at Ephesus speaks loudly (Rev. 2:2; cf. Rev. 2:18-23).
 - d. Then there is Paul's:
 - 1) Open and public rebuke of Peter at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-21).
 - 2) Threat to come to Corinth with the "rod" of correction or discipline if they refused to repent (1 Cor. 4:21, 2 Cor. 12:19-13:10; cf. 1 Cor. 16:22).
 - 3) Delivering Hymenaeus and Alexander unto Satan (1 Tim. 1:18-20).
 4. Note God's present-day threat to all unfaithful in Romans 11:17-23.

Lesson #3

C. WHAT DOES DISCIPLINE MEAN?

1. It embraces the idea of instruction, learning, education, doctrine; and is training or experience that corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects, esp., the mental faculties or moral character.
2. It is to develop by instruction and exercise, to train in self-control.
3. Discipline may also have reference to "chastisement inflicted by way of correction, or training by way of suffering;" correction or chastisement or punishment for the sake of training -- control gained by enforcing obedience or order.
4. These are exemplified in many N.T. passages (2 Tim. 4:1,2; Tit. 1:9-11; Tit. 2:11-15; Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 3:1-4).
5. From Thayer:
 - a. "The whole training and education of children," (Eph. 6:4. Compare translations on Eph. 6:4).
 - b. "Whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, especially, by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions."
 - c. "Instruction which aims at the increase of virtue," (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
 - d. "According to biblical usage, chastisement, chastening, (Heb. 12:5-8).
6. W.E. Vine, Vol. I, p. 316: "Literally saving the mind. . . Primarily, an admonishing or calling to soundness of mind, or to self-control," is used in 2 Tim. 1:7: KJV, "a sound mind;" RV: "discipline."
7. Discipline is twofold: 1. Instructive -- preventive in nature, and 2. Corrective -- chastising or penalizing in nature.
 - a. Prevention is always better than cure, and is always preferable to correction.
 - 1) "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."
 - 2) "Building boys ("As the twig is bent...") is better than mending men" (Prov. 22:6).
 - 3) "To cut off an offender is good; to cure him is better; but to prevent him from falling is best of all.
 - 4) Remember: **TEACHING IS DISCIPLINE!**
 - b. From this we note that church discipline also falls into three categories, with each church being duty bound to exercise it in regard to all three: 1. discipline to the faithful, 2. discipline to the wayward, and 3. discipline to the incorrigible.

- c. Church discipline, then, includes all the processes or means by which a church trains and educates its members to "walk in the light."
 - d. So, you see, **NOT ALL DISCIPLINE IS WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP.**
8. The withdrawal of fellowship is corrective discipline, and is the final resort in spiritual matters. And preventive discipline faithfully administered by a zealous church under the leadership of a qualified eldership will ordinarily prevent the necessity of disfellowshipping.
 9. The expression "church discipline" or "withdrawing fellowship" is not found in the Bible. But the subject is described and taught in the passages that pertain to discipline.
- D. WHY IS IT NECESSARY FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH TO MAINTAIN DISCIPLINE?
1. The definition of discipline goes a long way in answering this question.
 - a. Without it there could be no training, correcting, molding, strengthening, or perfecting of the mental faculties or moral character.
 - b. Without it there would be no self-control gained or soundness of mind, no spiritual cultivation of the soul, or correcting of mistakes and curbing of the passions.
 2. The purpose of discipline in a local church also demonstrates its necessity. (Purpose discussed in lesson #6)
 3. Society consists of individuals who are associated together by some common purpose, which necessitates discipline to govern, maintain order, and furnish protection. (In this sense the church is a society.)
 - a. Where there is society, there must be government.
 - b. Where there is government, there must be law.
 - c. Where there is law, there must be penalty for violation, with the penalty being enforced.
 - d. Otherwise, the law could not be enforced, the government could not be maintained, and society could not be protected.
 - e. This is true of every society and of all kinds of government: civil, parental, school, and church.
 4. Without discipline in the churches:
 - a. The influence of preaching is lessened and largely neutralized.
 - b. Confusion, disorder, and anarchy prevail (See 1 & 2 Cor.).
 - c. Moral and spiritual impurities are encouraged and Satan is the only one who profits.

5. Discipline is foundational. It is as old as the Garden of Eden and as modern as our latest space adventure.
 - a. The individual, the home, the community, the nation, all must have a twofold discipline if they are to function properly. WHY NOT THE CHURCH?
 - b. No one can become a Christian without discipline. And no one can remain a Christian without discipline. This is reflected in Mt. 28:18-20.

Lesson #4

E. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTION TO BE TAKEN IN MATTERS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

In any area of activity, spiritual or otherwise, responsibility for the necessary action must be established. Where then does the responsibility lie in matters of church discipline?

1. There is individual responsibility toward self-discipline (Mt. 7:21-27; Mt. 16:24-26; Lk. 11:35; 17:3; Ac. 20:28; 1 Cor. 3:10; 9:27; 10:31; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:1,2,5,16,17; 1 Tim 4:16; Heb. 3:12; 4:1; Jas. 1:12-15,26,27; 1 Pet. 3:15,16; 2 Pet. 3:17,18; Jude 21).
2. There is individual responsibility toward a brother (Mt. 5:23,24; 18:15,16; Gal. 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:17-20; Heb. 3:13; 10:24,25; Jas. 5:19,20; Jude 22,23; Prov. 11:30).
 - a. The first step in correcting others is genuine grief for their sinful condition.
 - 1) Love prompts this spirit (1 Cor. 13:6; Rom. 1:32).
 - 2) Examples of this spirit in the history of God's servants.
 - a) Samuel mourns over Saul (1 Sam. 15:35).
But it didn't keep him from doing his duty, (1 Sam. 15).
 - b) Ezra for Israel in marrying strange wives (Ezra 10). But again, he obeyed God.
 - c) Moses for the sins of Israel (Deut. 9) He prayed constantly to God for them; but he, also, disciplined them.
 - d) Paul for his Jewish brethren (Rom. 9: 1-3; 10:1-3), sorrow and prayer.
 - e) Lot for wicked Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7,8).
 - b. This feeling of love and grief for sin, and distress for sin in self and others, is an essential attitude in restoring; it fits us to go about the work of discipline (Gal. 6:1,2). But don't play "kick the can."
 - c. In order here is the attitude of the wise toward being corrected.
 - 1) Rebuke a wise man and he will love thee (Prov. 9:8).
 - 2) Teach a just man and he will increase in learning (Prov. 9:9).
 - 3) He that heareth reproof getteth understanding (Prov. 15:32).
 - 4) He that regardeth reproof shall be honored (Prov. 13:18).
 - 5) Reproof entereth into a wise man more than stripes into a fool, (Prov. 17:10).
 - 6) Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Prov. 27:6).
 - d. Also, the attitude of a fool toward correction.
 - 1) Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words (Prov. 23:9).
 - 2) He that hateth reproof is brutish (Prov. 12:1).
 - 3) Fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7).

- 4) He that refuseth reproof erreth (Prov. 10:17).
 - 5) Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed (Prov 13:13).
3. Then there is the responsibility of the elders of the church (Ac. 20:28; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:5; Tit. 1:9-11).
 4. Finally, there is collective responsibility, the church as a whole (Mt. 18:17; Ac. 15:22; Rom. 16:17,18; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,13; 2 Th. 3:6-15; Rev. 2:2).
 5. Remember that a failure to exercise self-discipline is what brings about the need for church discipline.
 6. Remember also that we must be longsuffering and forgiving, which proves we did it for the right purpose and with proper motive in the first place.
 - a. 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Eph. 4:1-3; 2 Cor. 2:6-11; Mt. 18:21-35; Lk. 17:3,4,5.
 - b. In 2 Cor. 2:6-11, note with what tenderness and love they were to receive him back into fellowship:
 - 1) Lest he "should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow," (vv. 7,8).
 - 2) That they might prove their obedience in all things (v.9).
 - 3) And that Satan might not gain the advantage of them, (v.11).

Lesson #5

- F. WHO SHOULD RECEIVE CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINARY ACTION IN AND BY THE LOCAL CHURCH? OR, FROM WHOM IS FELLOWSHIP TO BE WITHDRAWN?
1. A word of warning is here in order.
 - a. There is a difference between the mature Christian and the new-born babe in Christ. The babe in Christ should be given sufficient time for instruction, learning, and growing in the faith and knowledge before a church would consider disfellowship. It takes time for Christ to be formed in God's child.
 - b. At all times caution is to be urged with respect to withdrawing. We are to be longsuffering, patient and kind. Fellowship is never severed until all other means to effect repentance and restoration of the offender have failed.
 - c. Remember, submission to our Lord and Master is voluntary; heaven's kingdom is not advanced by force (Jn. 18:36; Mt. 26:51,52). Consequently, corrective discipline is designed to provoke willing compliance rather than forced submission to the will of God.
 - d. Though we are to be longsuffering and caution is urged, we are, nevertheless, to withdraw when circumstances require it. For if we, under any circumstances, become wilful sinners we are doomed (Heb. 10:26-30). And we are as guilty of sin through our wilful omission of needed discipline as is the sinner through his wilful commission of sin; both are violations of God's word.
 - e. Thus, when all other scriptural means of restoration, lovingly applied, fail, all are subject to being disfellowshipped who knowingly, wilfully, and impenitently continue in sin, ANY SIN! Unless, of course, there are some sins which will not damn the soul! (1 Jn. 3:4; Isa. 59:1,2; Col. 1:21; Ac. 8:18-23; Jn. 8:21,24; 1Cor. 5:6,7; Eph. 5:27).
 - f. Fellowship is never to be severed because of sins one has committed, but rather because of an impenitent disposition of heart toward those sins, which causes him to continue to practice them or to refuse to make amends for them.
 2. Now hear God's word on who are to be disfellowshipped upon their failure to repent and be restored.
 - a. Those who are guilty of offending a brother (Mt. 18:15-17).
 - b. Those who are immoral in their conduct and who practice the works of the flesh: the effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind -- sex perverts, thieves, drunkards, extortioners, revilers, covetous, idolaters, railers, fornicators, whoremongers, and the unclean, et al (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-11; Mt. 19:9; Eph. 5:3-7; Rom. 1:24-32; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8).

- c. False teachers and all who cause division and sow discord and offence (Rom. 16:17,18; 1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Tit. 1:9-11; 2 Jn. 9-11; Prov. 6:16-19).
 - d. Heretics (Tit. 3:10,11).
 - e. Hypocrites (1 Cor. 16:22).
 - f. Elders who continue in sin (1 Tim. 5:17-20; Ac. 20:29,30. What sin? Any sin of which they will not repent).
 - g. All who walk disorderly, even busybodies and those who will not work (2 Th. 3:6-15; 1 Th. 5:14).
 - h. How could we say habitually forsaking the assembling with the saints is an exception? (Heb. 10:25).
 - 1) Is such an one not walking disorderly or out of order?
 - 2) This is not the "worst" sin among brethren, but it is probably the most widespread.
 - 3) In fact, it is so widespread that some seem to think of it as "a little sin."
3. Remember: We can only discipline our own members (1 Cor. 5:9-13; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). But there is a principle involved here which we need to see: Any publicly known sin of any kind by a member of this church demands public correction.
- a. Because God does not differentiate between sin (Jas. 2:10).
 - b. Because to fellowship a sinner is to partake of his sins (2 Jn. 9-11; 2 Cor.6:14-18; Eph. 5:11; 1Tim. 5:22).
 - c. Because we should desire to save the sinner (Jas. 5:19,20; Gal. 6:1,2).
 - d. Because God demands it (2 Th. 3:6-15).
4. We need to learn this great lesson: The ideal servant is one who loves the Lord's instruction, even if it corrects, changes, and chastises (Prov. 2; Psa. 1).

Lesson #6

G. WHAT IS THE DESIGN OR PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE AND OF WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP?

1. To save the soul of the one disfellowshipped (1 Cor. 5:4,5; 1 Tim. 1:19,20; Heb. 12:14,15; 2 Cor. 7:1).
 - a. The immediate purpose of delivering unto Satan is for the "destruction of the flesh" (the works and deeds of the flesh, Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 5:5).
 - b. The ultimate purpose is the saving of the spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5).
 - c. The expression "deliver unto Satan" takes the form of:
 - 1) "Might be taken away from among you," (v.2).
 - 2) "Purge out therefore the old leaven," (v.7).
 - 3) "Not company with," (vv.9-11).
 - 4) "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person," (v.13).
 - 5) It means to publicly recognize and declare the sinner for what he is. Remember: The declaration does not make him a child of the devil; his actions have done that (Jn. 8:44).
 - d. "Have no company with him, that he may be ashamed," (2 Th. 3:14).
 - 1) "...ashamed, i.e., to turn one upon himself and so produce a feeling of shame, a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct." -- W.E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.
2. To save the church -- that the church might be purged and preserved as pure (1 Cor. 5:1,2,6,7,13; cf. Eph.5:27; Rev. 2:12-16; 2:18-23).
3. That others also may fear (1 Tim. 5:19,20; Ac. 5:1-11).
 - a. Such action will cause us to examine our own lives.
 - b. If all members knew to expect discipline when sin is allowed to rule their lives, very little corrective discipline would be necessary.
4. To magnify, exalt, and maintain the honor of Christ and his authority, (1 Cor. 5:4; 1 Pet. 2:12; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17; Mt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22; 2 Th. 3:6; Lk. 6:46; Mt. 7:21).

THESE ARE HIGH AND HOLY PURPOSES!

Lesson #7

H. HOW SHOULD CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE BE CARRIED OUT?

You don't just pray for them, or simply take their names off the roll, and forget about them. This has been done, and is being done, all too often!

1. The certainty of the guilty or innocence of the accused must be ascertained (Num. 35:12,30; Deut. 13:14; Deut. 17:2-6; 1 Tim. 5:19).
2. The disorderly must be warned and vividly impressed about his wrong (1 Th. 5:14; Mt. 18:15-17; Tit. 3:10,11).
3. There must be sufficient, sincere, diligent, longsuffering effort to restore the disorderly (in spirit of meekness and without partiality) (Gal. 6:1,2; Jas. 5:19,20; Phil. 2:1-16; Eph. 4:1-3; 1 Th. 5:14; 2 Tim.4:2).
4. If, after guilt has been established, warning has been given, sufficient, sincere, diligent efforts to restore have been exerted, the disorderly refuses to repent and make amends, fellowship must be withdrawn as the final effort to lead him to repentance.
5. This is to be done openly, publicly, "when ye are gathered together," (1 Cor. 5:4; 2 Cor.2:6; Ac. 15:22; Mt. 18:17).
6. Keep records for future reference. Discuss why.

Lesson #8

- I. HOW THE DISFELLOWSHIPED SHOULD BE TREATED AND WHAT ATTITUDE SHOULD THE FAITHFUL HAVE TOWARD THEM. OR, WHAT WITHDRAWING MEANS FROM A PRACTICAL STANDPOINT.
1. Mt. 18:17, "...let him be unto thee as an heathen man and as a publican."
 - a. Treat him as we properly treat heathen men and publicans, or men outside the church with wicked habits -- having not, sharing not, condoning not fellowship with his sinful life.
 - b. Treat him as we ought to treat one not connected with the church -- with kindness and compassion, as one interested in his soul and seeking his salvation, yet in such a way as to leave no doubt regarding our lack of fellowship with him because of his sin.
 - c. Note the context of Mt. 18:15-17; preceded by concern for the lost in vv. 10-14, and is followed by forgiveness for the erring in vv. 21-35.
 2. Rom. 16:17, we are to "mark" and "avoid" them.
 - a. To "mark" is to observe attentively, to watch.
 - b. "Avoid" is from "EKKLINO, out plus to bend, to turn aside, to turn away from.
 - 1) lit., the bend out of, is used in Rom. 3:12, of the sinful condition of mankind (A.V., 'gone out of the way, 'R.V., 'turned aside.')
 - 2) Used in Rom. 16:17, of turning away from those who cause offenses and occasions of stumbling..." -W.E. Vine, Expository Dict. of N.T. Words.
 - c. Our actions toward such a one must in no way encourage him in his sin, but make him keenly conscious of God's disapproval.
 3. 2 Th. 3:14,15, we are to "have no company with him... count him not as an enemy...admonish him as a brother."
 - a. "To keep company with harlots" (Prov. 29:3) meant "To feed, enjoy, have delight."
 - b. We are to shun him insofar as associating with him as a comrade is concerned.
 - c. We are to withdraw, "to shrink back from, to avoid, to take care against a thing, to remove one's self, to depart, to abstain from familiar intercourse with."
 - d. We are not to mix or mingle with, not to associate with.
 - e. We are to hate his sin, but not to treat him as one hated.
 - f. The surest way to treat him as an enemy is to overlook his sin and to tell him he is doing well (Prov. 27:6).
 - g. We must not overlook his sin, but neither should we be harsh and cruel toward the disfellowshipped.

- h. He should be treated in such a way that he finds reassuring signs of love from his brethren, but no signs of weakness toward sin.
4. We are to "put away," "deliver unto Satan," and "with such a one no not to eat," (1 Cor. 5:5,11,13).
- a. Do not use him in the public worship service; do not even have a social meal with him.
 - b. To eat with a man was to acknowledge him as a worthy equal. Note the Jews and Peter in Acts 11:3.
 - c. We are in no way to encourage him in his sin, "not even to sit at table" with him; no social engagements with him.
 - d. Keep him aware that he is in Satan's camp as long as he continues in his sin.
5. We must stand ready to forgive and receive him back into fellowship when he repents, and let him know we are ready, not just talk about it, do it (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

Lesson #9

J. OBJECTIONS TO DISFELLOWSHIPING CONSIDERED.

1. Failing to fully understand the true purpose of disfellowshipping contributes its share to the objections offered.

Review Lesson #6

2. "The Parable of the Tares opposes church discipline by teaching us to let the saint and the sinner grow together in the church, lest while we gather up the tares, we root up also the wheat with them!"
 - a. If it does, then Jesus contradicts himself and his apostles are false preachers.
 - b. The fact is, this parable doesn't refer to church discipline. Jesus said, "the field is the world;" he didn't say it is the church (Mt. 13:24-30,36-43).
 - c. In human society, in the world, the wicked and the righteous do dwell together (1 Cor. 5:9-11).
 - d. There is no teaching in God's word that is opposed to wholesome and necessary church discipline. Rather, it is commanded in God's word.
3. "Mt. 7:1 says we are not supposed to judge anyone. And this is what we are doing if we disfellowship anyone."
 - a. Study Mt. 7:1 in context.
 - 1) The kind of judging involved in v. 1 is forbidden as sinful.
 - 2) But vv. 3-6 show that kind to be "harsh, unkind, hypocritical judgment," or censoriousness.
 - 3) See vv. 15-20.
 - b. Now study Jn. 7:24; Mt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 6:5; 1 Cor. 5:12,13; 1 Jn. 4:1; 2 Jn. 9-11.

Lesson #10

J. OBJECTIONS TO DISFELLOWSHIPPING CONSIDERED (Continued).

4. "We cannot withdraw from those who have already withdrawn from us."
Or, "When one ceases to assemble with the saints, he has withdrawn himself and the church needs no further action."
- a. This is a feeble excuse offered to escape unpleasant responsibility, for the church is commanded to withdraw from all who walk disorderly, and it is the church that does the withdrawing, not the sinner from the church.
 - b. Furthermore, the good shepherd goes after his wayward sheep (Jn. 10; Lk. 15), and the elders stand in the same relation to the congregation that the shepherd does to his flock (Ac. 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17).
 - 1) To say that fellowship cannot be withdrawn from those who have withdrawn themselves, the purpose being to reclaim them, is to argue that the shepherd cannot seek his lost sheep.
 - 2) Furthermore, it is in the very context of the shepherd leaving the ninety and nine in the fold to seek the one which had gone astray (Mt. 18:12-14) that Jesus commands corrective discipline (vv. 15-17).
 - c. Moreover, since military terms are used to describe the affairs of the kingdom of God (2 Tim. 2:3,4; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 2:25; 2 Th. 3:6-15), let us use the relationship to illustrate the fallacy of this fallacious philosophy.
 - 1) The soldier who goes AWOL is not free from any disciplinary action simply because he "withdrew" himself from his company.
 - 2) How then is the soldier in the Lord's army free? Note several things that are not accomplished when the disorderly "withdraws himself," and the church takes no action whatever.
 - A) The offender does not know he has been withdrawn from.
 - B) He does not realize he has been "delivered back to Satan."
 - C) The faithful members of the church do not know he has been withdrawn from and may even disobey a divine command.
 - D) He is not "ashamed," but usually "puffed up."
 - E) The primary purpose of all discipline is not accomplished.
 - F) The church is subject to corrupting influences.
 - G) The world doesn't know he has been withdrawn from either. So far as they know, our silence equals condoning his behavior, and like David of old, we have given occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme.
 - e. The idea behind this objection seems to have several points:
 - 1) Cases of withdrawal are to be only toward those who are "still in the church," or still coming to the assemblies.

- b. If it will, God commanded something which will tear up the church.
 - c. If it will, God commands that which will do more harm than good.
 - d. This is nonsense. If withdrawal is needed, the trouble is already in the church.
 - e. In fact, the church will be torn up or ruined if we don't withdraw.
6. "It may harden them so they will never return."
 - a. Strange that God didn't know this.
 - b. Let us talk about what the Bible says it did and will do, instead of what men think it may or may not do.
 7. "We are not without sin, therefore, we cannot mark others; for the Bible says, 'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.'"
 - a. True, no Christian lives perfectly without sinning; but he who walks in the light, does not live in or practice sin, and the Bible does not call him a "sinner" (1 Jn. 1:7; 1 Jn. 3:4-10; Eph. 2:1).
 - b. Furthermore, we are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).
 8. "People will leave the church and go to the denominations."
 - a. One who would leave the Lord's church and "go to the denominations" because of purity of life and faithfulness are required would be a help to the church, not an injury.
 - b. Actually, the reverse will be the case. It will result in people respecting the church for its stand. (Example: Church in Paducah, Ky.)
 9. "Discipline will 'make trouble' in the community and the families."
 - a. It is ridiculous to talk about "making trouble" in a home where the husband is untrue to his wife or the wife to her husband. The trouble is already there.
 - b. The same is true of any other sin or work of the flesh unrepented of.
 - c. Proper discipline will not "make trouble"; it will aid in seeking to correct it with God's blessings.
 10. Some have been known to say, "Well, I never heard the old-time preachers say anything about this." Or say, "This is the way it has been for over 30 years."
 - a. If true, it would only mean the "old time preachers" failed to do their duty as preachers.
 - b. It wouldn't make it right if it should go on for another 30 years.
 - c. Neglect, objections, and excuses are but tools of Satan used to deny the plain word of God and the duty of the saints led by faithful elders.

- 2) When one withdraws, our responsibility to him is over.
- 3) We may rightly drop the names of the unfaithful from the roll and avoid the thorny points of discipline. But such is not the case for such action would show a lack of faith in God's word and a lack of love for God as well as for the individual in sin.
- f. Israel and Judah forgot Jehovah days without number (Jer. 2:32; 3:6-10).
 - 1) They had "forsaken the Lord" (Isa. 1:4) as brethren today do in forsaking public worship.
 - 2) Yet after many years of gracious longsuffering, God punished them through the Assyrians and Babylonians.
 - 3) Their withdrawal from God and the long lapse of time did not preclude Divine chastisement from being exercised.
- g. As James Needham said:
 - 1) "It is unscriptural: There is no scripture that even hints at the idea of members withdrawing from the church. We can read plain instructions for the church to withdraw from ungodly members..., but NOT ONE WORD about ungodly members withdrawing from the church..."
 - 2) "It sanctions free-lance membership: There are two ways by which one can remove his membership from a local church: a) By transferring it from one sound church to another, or b) By death. Until one of these events occurs, one remains a member of the congregation where he holds membership. He may be classified as a faithful or unfaithful member, but in either case, he is a member.
 "If this is not true, then free-lance membership is sanctioned. One could decide he no longer wants to be a member of a local church, withdraw his membership and become a free-lancer. I have not found any authority for free-lance membership. Christians in the New Testament were identified with some local church." (NOTE: Bro. Needham no longer believes or teaches this. This material was first prepared while he still held this view. I still believe he was right. EJD)
 - 3) "It would create a loophole in God's law" If this be a scriptural concept, the church could never withdraw from the disorderly (2 Th. 3:6), because the disorderly would always beat it to the draw. All they would have to do to avoid being withdrawn from would be to say, 'You can't withdraw from me, I have already withdrawn from you...' The church would then be helpless to carry out the command to withdraw from the disorderly (2 Th. 3:6)."
5. "It will tear up the church or make trouble in the church and do more harm than good."
 - a. It didn't tear up the church at Corinth.

Lesson #11

K. WHY IS THIS PLAIN BIBLE TEACHING ON DISCIPLINE
NEGLECTED?

1. Because so little is taught about it and few people have seen it practiced.
 - a. Most local churches can hardly lay claim to even believing N.T. teaching on discipline.
 - b. How long since you have heard anything more than reference to church discipline?
 - c. For this reason many continue to misunderstand the real purposes of it and continue to offer objections to it just as some people do to baptism for the remission of sins.
 - d. When more is taught on it and more of it is practiced, more Christians will believe in it.
 - e. This being true, it means we are presently ignorant of what the Bible demands on matters of discipline.
2. Because our faith is weak and our spiritual barometer is falling.
3. Because of a lack of concern for erring brethren. "Oh, well, it is his soul, let him do what he wants to with it." This is deplorable!
4. Because of fear: (Rev. 21:8)
 - a. Of what the guilty party will do when disciplined.
 - b. Of what the guilty party's family and friends will do.
 - c. Of sin and guilt in our own lies.
 - d. Of hurting someone's feelings.
 - e. Of tearing up the church and driving people away.
5. Because we don't want to get involved. But we are already involved if we are members of the church; and it is high time we realized it!
6. Because it has been neglected so long and there is so much sin in the church, we don't know where to start, or can't find enough faithful ones to start it.
 - a. Sin begets sin.
 - b. Neglect of sin can tie our hands and render us incapable of any constructive action.
7. Because of incompetence in the eldership. Not qualified.
8. Because of unfaithfulness in the eldership--winking at sin.

9. Because of pressure from unbelieving and unruly members who will not follow the lead of God-fearing elders in administering it. Thus it becomes one of the most difficult things an eldership has to do--which makes it easy to neglect.

Lesson #12

L. WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP IS EFFECTIVE WHEN DONE AS GOD DIRECTS

1. The case of the Corinthians proves that the divine plan works as intended (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:1-11).
2. But even if the incestuous man had not repented, the church at Corinth would have:
 - a. Maintained the authority of Christ.
 - b. Made a sincere effort to save the sinful brother.
 - c. Proved themselves pure in the matter (2 Cor. 2:11).
 - d. Proved their love (Rev. 3:19; Prov. 13:24; Heb. 12:5ff; cf. Heb. 12:10 with 1 Cor. 5:5):
 - 1) One for another (2 Cor. 2:4).
 - 2) For the church (1 Cor. 5:2).
 - 3) Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Prov. 27:6).
 - e. Proved their faith in God's word and their devotion to the Cause (2 Cor. 2:9).
 - 1) It shows whether or not we really believe God's word and that God's word is best and right.
 - 2) It shows we believe what we profess and that we will perform the word of the Lord.
 - f. Protected the church from evil influences.
 - g. Given Satan no advantage by the ravages of scandal.
 - h. Showed the world the church stood for truth and righteousness.
3. When withdrawal is exercised without partiality (1 Tim. 5:19-21), when the motive is redemption, when the spirit is love, and when the means are pure (free of malice), then God is pleased, brethren are strengthened, and sinners are saved.

* * * * *

1. N.T. teaching on discipline must be obeyed, which we do not do by ignoring it, or by having good intentions, or by talking it to death without doing anything about it.
2. Discipline is as much a command and just as necessary as baptism for the remission of sins. We dare not shun our responsibility (Jas. 4:17).
3. It is wholly inconsistent to insist on the law of admission into fellowship and then discard the law of exclusion from fellowship; both are enjoined; both are to be respected and obeyed.

4. How many have drifted away from Christ whom we could have saved had we cared enough to discipline? Only God knows!
5. Let us delay no longer (Heb. 12:1-3; 2:1-3; 12:25).

Lesson #13

M. WITHDRAWING FROM THE WITHDRAWN (further considered)

1. The question is sometimes raised: "Is it right to withdraw fellowship from a member who has already withdrawn himself from the church?"
 - a. The answer depends largely upon what is meant by one "withdrawing himself."
 - b. Each case must be determined upon the basis of its own particular circumstances.
 - 1) One may withdraw and identify with another sound church in another place in the same city or community.
 - 2) One may withdraw and move to another place, either in or out of state.
 - c. In general, however, the question probably has reference to a member who ceases to assemble for public worship with the saints.
 - d. So, in reality, we are talking about administering corrective discipline to those who have forsaken the assembling of themselves together with the saints of which Heb. 10:25 speaks.
2. Some wonder if such a one can be scripturally withdrawn from if he no longer attends services where he is a member. Perhaps the following points will help clarify the right answer.
3. The purpose of the church withdrawing fellowship is served whether the disorderly is in attendance or not.
 - a. Briefly, the purpose involves:
 - 1) Saving the erring brother (1 Cor. 5:5; Jas. 5:20).
 - 2) Removing ungodly leaven which threatens to contaminate others (1 Cor. 5:6).
 - 3) Promoting godly fear and respect for the Truth among all, (1 Tim. 5:20; Ac. 5:11).
 - b. The church action of which we speak -- corrective discipline of withdrawing fellowship -- is designed to make the disorderly "ashamed" (lit. means to turn in, that is, to turn one upon himself and so produce a feeling of shame; a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct," Vine's Exp. Dict. of N.T. Words.
 - c. Fellowship in the Lord's affairs extends beyond public assembling to the numerous daily contacts among Christians; such, social, economic, recreational, etc.
 - 1) Paul meant more than the assembly when he said, "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:13).
 - 2) He was including all of these other various contacts as well, for he explained: (1 Cor. 5:9-11) "...have no company...with such a one, no, not to eat."

- d. A member might "withdraw himself" by forsaking public worship for any number of sinful causes, yet still desire the company and seek the friendship of faithful brethren in personal affairs.
- 1) But scriptural discipline DENIES him such company so as to make him ASHAMED of his condition before God.
 - 2) One finding himself so ostracized by all Christians with whom he formerly associated cannot help but examine his wayward state.
 - a) That is, if fellowship with the saints ever meant anything to him in the first place.
 - b) And if it never meant anything to him, it is time everyone knew about it.
 - 3) Then there remains but two alternatives:
 - a) Either his heart will be hardened in his sin (perhaps revealing a perverted and self-condemned condition (Tit. 3:11)
 - b) Or, godly sorrow will work repentance unto salvation, (2 Cor. 2:6-11; 7:10).
- e. Thus this purpose as well as the other objectives of corrective discipline may be served even in the case of one forsaking public assembly.
4. The Lord commands withdrawal from the "disorderly," (2 Th. 3:6) "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly..."
- a. This means those who persist in being "...out of ranks; irregular; or deviating from the prescribed order or rule."
 - b. One of the most common sins of negligent or rebellious brethren is a violation of Heb. 10:25 (which also involves Mt. 6:33).
 - c. If the church is unable to discipline those forsaking the assembling of themselves together with the saints (as some claim), then the church is unable to deal with one of the most prevalent of sins within the body of Christ.
 - d. This would mean the Divine pattern would be insufficient, which is a false conclusion.
 - e. Since God's plan is perfect (2 Pet. 1:3; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 1:25), we have the necessary instructions in dealing with this and every form of disorderliness. See also 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 4:1-5.
5. Another point which helps to clarify the point of withdrawing from the withdrawn: a good shepherd goes after his wayward sheep (Lk. 15:3-7).
- a. A good shepherd doesn't conclude that his hands are tied in the matter and there is nothing he can do because the sheep "withdrew first" from him.
 - 1) He, as a good shepherd, makes every effort to save them -- rescue them, which is the very purpose of withdrawal of fellowship.

- b. Elders have the work of shepherds watching for souls (1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17).
 - 1) So do churches, either with or without elders.
 - 2) Can they afford to say to the CHIEF SHEPHERD of their failure to discipline: "Those unruly sheep jumped the fence and got into the enemy's pasture, so there was nothing we could do when they had already withdrawn themselves?"

6. Another point: if the disorderly can withdraw themselves and avoid discipline, where is the scripture teaching such?
 - a. The instructions are plain for the church to withdraw from ungodly members (1 Cor. 5:4,5; Rom. 16:17,18; 2 Th. 3:6, 14).
 - 1) But the word is silent on the reverse action -- or the member withdrawing from the church and thus avoiding corrective discipline.
 - 2) All we do must be in harmony with truth (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).
 - 3) Where is the authority for reversing the action of the church withdrawing from the ungodly?
 - b. Furthermore, if one's having withdrawn himself from assembling with the saints means he can't be disciplined by that group of saints for that sin, why couldn't he also withdraw himself and avoid church discipline for any and every sin he might commit?
 - c. What a loophole we create by such teaching!

7. Another Point: It is objected that an employer would have no power to fire an employee who had already left the company.
 - a. Is that all that fellowship in the local church means? Is it like being in a civic or country club?
 - b. This is misleading because the comparison is one of inequality.
 - 1) Fellowship in Christ and in the local church is far more intimate and all inclusive because it is a spiritual relationship to God and in the family of God.
 - c. The parallel ought rather to be made between soldiers in any army (2 Tim. 2:4; Phil. 2:25).
 - 1) An AWOL (absent-without-official-leave) soldier knows he's not free from disciplinary action, even court-martial by his unit simply because he "withdrew" himself first.

8. One final point: Israel and Judah forgot Jehovah days without number (Jer. 2:32; 3:6-10).
 - a. They had "forsaken the Lord" (Isa. 1:4) as brethren today do in forsaking public worship.
 - b. After many years of gracious longsuffering, God finally punished his disobedient children through the Assyrians and Babylonians.

- c. Their withdrawal from God and the long lapse of time did not preclude Divine chastisement from being exercised.

III. CONCLUSION

1. We hope these points are sufficient to show this objection is invalid: "You can't withdraw from the withdrawn because they have already withdrawn themselves."
2. Our responsibility toward those forsaking the assembling of themselves and our seeking to restore them is evident just as it is toward the disorderly who do assemble.
3. It would be easy just to drop their names and take no other action after a period of continued absence.
4. That would eliminate some of the thorns involved in disciplinary action. But it would not show brotherly love, nor love toward God and his word.
5. Don't let human wisdom and sophistry replace a "thus saith the Lord."