

doing this to save them because we love them (Jude 23, I Corinthians 5:5). Sadly, worldly love often says we ought to accept people without asking them to change. We are fortunate God does not see it this way, otherwise we would still be in our sins. Love seeks the best for others, and sometimes that includes things that they do not desire. If someone is walking in sin, they are lost; why would we want them to continue on that path?

Second, we are also doing this to preserve ourselves from a contamination by sin. Paul said that a little bit of leaven leavens the whole lump (I Corinthians 5:6), meaning one sin, when unchallenged, can grow into the sinful conduct of many. In the Old Testament we read of the story of Achan, who sinned against God and hurt the entire congregation of Israel (Joshua 7). Sin hurts everyone, and not dealing with it causes even greater harm.

Third, we are doing this to show everyone that it matters how we live our life (Psalm 26:4-5). This ultimate discipline is NOT for punishment, since they will be punished eternally (Romans 6:23). It is not the work of the elders only, as seen in Corinth (I Corinthians 5:5). Finally, it is not the work of the church only, but it is up to each individual member to enforce this decision (I Corinthians 5:11).

So what does this withdrawal look like? The Bible tells us the following:

- Rom. 16:17 – Note them
- Titus 3:10 – Reject them

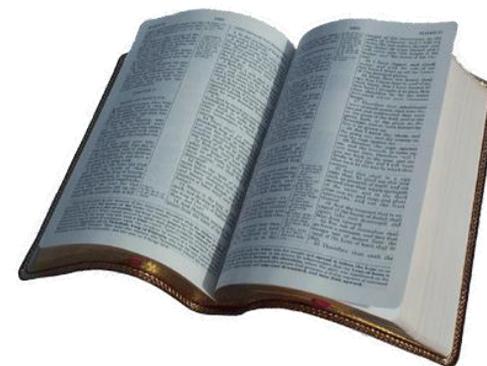
- I Cor. 5:5 – Deliver (remove) them
- I Cor. 6:9 – Do not keep company
- 2 Thess. 3:14 – Do not keep company
- I Cor. 6:11 – Do not eat with them
- 2 John 10 – Do not receive them

These passages describe the avoidance of social interactions with one who refuses to walk in the light. It also describes their forced separation from the assembly.

This action can be very difficult, particularly if it is called of us of close friends or family. Yet Jesus said "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*" (Matthew 10:37). Again, we must understand that if we love someone, we will do what is best for their soul. They are not our enemy, but our brother (2 Thessalonians 3:15 "*Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*")

We are the house of God (Hebrews 3:6). The value of our house is tied directly to church discipline; church discipline is the way that membership means anything. Nothing is worth more than what it costs.

Church Membership and Discipline



Imagine that you lived in a country where breaking the law brought no penalty. It would not be long before you would find that not enforcing laws is a terrible idea. In a similar way, pretend that you are in a family where the children are allowed to do whatever they want, and they are never disciplined. Is this a family with which you want to spend time? Now assume that this undisciplined group is not a country or a family, but a local church (which is both the city of God – Hebrews 12:22-23 – and the Family of God – Ephesians 2:19). What would it be like to be in a church where no one was ever told that they needed to change, and no one was ever held accountable for their actions?

In I Corinthians Paul wrote to the church of Christ in Corinth and explained to them that they were not conducting themselves as a church ought to behave. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-28 he explained to them the vision of the church; a model that is purposefully designed with a part for all members, and the importance of membership.

Membership and Fellowship

In particular, he focused on the idea of Personal Membership (*Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.* 1 Corinthians 12:27). We need to understand that membership is a conscious and calculated commitment to a local group of Christians. An example of this

commitment is seen through Paul's joining himself to the Christians in Jerusalem in Acts 9:26.

What are the obligations of local church membership?

- To assemble together (Hebrews 10:24-26)
- To edify one another (Ephesians 4:16)
- To admonish one another (Galatians 6:1-2)
- To bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:1-2)

We need to know that our Membership is linked to (but not the same as) Fellowship. Sadly, many think fellowship is a physical thing akin to eating a meal together or spending time together. This is not what the Bible says. According to I John 1:3-7, fellowship is walking in the light, which is being obedient to God in our lifestyle. *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..."* (1 John 1:7a). We only have fellowship through God with those who also walk in the light; fellowship is a right relationship with God. When we start doing things that are not godly, we are no longer in fellowship with God or in fellowship with others who are of God.

We need to know that if we fall out of fellowship, it should lead to being out of membership. This is seen in I Corinthians 5:4-11, when the man who was sinning (and therefore out of

fellowship) was commanded to be removed from the assembly (thus revoking his membership).

A big part of our relationship in Christ is to admonish one another. Admonish means warning each other of dangers that we engage in (Romans 15:14, Colossians 3:16, 2 Thessalonians 3:15). But sometimes we do not listen to each other. The Bible provides a plan to handle such situations in Matthew 18:15-17 and Titus 3:10-11.

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." Matthew 18:15-17

If one refuses to live correctly, and insists on sustaining broken fellowship, we who are the church must withdraw from them. We are not "dis-fellowshipping" them, since they already broke fellowship by their choice of conduct. We are refusing to participate in their sin.

Withdrawing From a Brother

Why are we doing this? First, we are