

Church Discipline

A Scriptural and Practical Guide For Orderly Church Judgment

“Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:18

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

I Corinthians 3:16-17

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

I Timothy 3:15

**The Church of Greenville
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Foreword

If a New Testament local church is the body of Jesus Christ (I Cor 12:27), then the members should love righteousness and hate sin by the same Spirit He does (Heb 1:9). Rather than being puffed up either in corporate or individual pride and compromise, let us mourn about sin in our midst with the same grief and anger as the holy God (I Cor 5:2).

The disciples of Christ are known by their love one to another (John 13:35). Yet the holy love of a saint is only and always shown in a context of proper knowledge and judgment (Phil 1:9-11). If we truly love God, we will not tolerate public sins in His temple and house (Eph 2:19-22). With the wisdom from above, we will rank purity over peace and gentleness (James 3:17).

Our adversary, which has persecuted the church from the beginning, is seeking churches he may devour (Rev 12:1-17). We are in a spiritual war for our souls (I Pet 5:8; Eph 6:10-20). Instead of worrying if the children have enough programs to keep their depraved hearts happy, let us assume a holy spirit of vigilance and sobriety to resist his destructive advances (James 4:7).

In these perilous times of the last days, when godly religion is a mere form without any authority (II Tim 3:1-7), may the zealous spirit of Phinehas, and the jealous spirit of Elijah, be seen once again to defend the honor and glory of the holy God (Num 25:1-15; I Kgs 19:10,14). Will the Lord find such a man or woman in this ungodly generation (Ezek 22:30)?

Is there a church that will heed the warning to Thyatira and cast out Jezebel and others who commit fornication and defile the worship of God (Rev 2:18-29)? Let us earnestly contend for our once-delivered faith (Jude 1:3).

When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth (Luke 18:8)?

Introduction

1. A manual of church discipline summarizes how a local congregation of Jesus Christ is to deal with various kinds of sinful situations that arise among church members. While the English word “discipline” does not occur in the Bible, we use it to describe the judgment of sin by a church.
2. Books have been written and many think highly of their own opinions, but the only true source for Godly knowledge of this subject comes from the Bible. There is no other place to look for answers to this issue.
3. The matter of church discipline creates many questions and strong opinions. From the extremes of rejecting any judgment in the name of love to burning heretics at the stake in vile hatred, so called Christian churches have held many different positions on this important subject.
4. Churches have been divided by discipline being applied too severely or too leniently. Because family members and close friends are often involved, human sentiment becomes an important factor.
5. Churches have been divided by discipline being applied or needed in complex situations where many members were very confused. Because of the variety of individuals and their relationships, very difficult and confusing situations can arise requiring unique discipline application.
6. The only way to fully please God in this world as Christian saints is to conduct ourselves always and only according to plain direction of the Scriptures. Only by doing so is a congregation an obedient church.
7. Please remember when beginning this subject to rightly consider how much God hates sin and the righteous indignation His saints have had for it. Living in the incontinent and lascivious United States in the year 2001, we face a very powerful influence to compromise and excuse sin.

The Importance

1. A church is the visible part of the kingdom of Christ, and He hates sin.
Romans 14:17-18; I Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 12:28-29; Revelation 1:9; Proverbs 6:16-19; Hebrews 1:9.
2. Our efforts to worship God are a stench without discipline.
Joshua 7:1-15; Isaiah 1:10-20; 58:1 – 59:21; 66:1-6; I Corinthians 11:20-22,30-32; Revelation 2:2,6,15.
3. We are the sanctified body of Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:25-32; I Corinthians 5:6-8; 12:27; I Peter 3:13-16.
4. Jesus Christ walks among the candlesticks.
Revelation 1:10-20; 2:1-5,23; 3:1; I Corinthians 3:16-17.
5. We commune together at the Lord's table.
John 13:10-11,21; I Corinthians 5:6-8; 10:20-21; Galatians 5:9.
6. Harboring sinners is partaking of sin with the sinners.
Ephesians 5:7; II John 1:10-11; Revelation 2:12-16; 18:4; I Timothy 5:22.
7. Laxity in discipline will bring God's judgment.
Joshua 7:1-26; I Corinthians 11:30-32; James 5:9; Revelation 2:20-23.
8. Proper discipline will leave fear in the heart of all.
Deut 13:6-11; 17:8-13; 19:15-21; 21:18-21; Prov 19:25; 21:11; Eccl 8:11; Acts 5:1-11; I Tim 5:20.
9. Spiritual prosperity requires a pure congregation.
Psalms 144:11-15; John 7:17; I Corinthians 15:33; II Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 4:11-16; James 4:4.
10. God has given His Word for us to judge ourselves.
Psalms 119:128; Isaiah 8:20; I Timothy 3:15; II Timothy 3:16-17; I Corinthians 5:12-13; Rev 2:14-16.

The Need

1. It is sad we need this subject, but we are sinners in a sinful world.
Matthew 13:47-50; 22:8-14; Acts 20:28-31; I Corinthians 11:19; I John 1:5-10; 2:18-19.
2. There is an absolute breakdown in discipline and judgment at all levels.
Isaiah 3:4-5,12; II Timothy 3:1-5, 13; Romans 1:28-32; II Timothy 4:1-5.
3. Judgment is resented and reviled by the ignorant and rebellious.
Exodus 32:22-24; Numbers 16:41-50; Matthew 7:1; I Corinthians 5:1-2; Proverbs 13:24; Hebrews 12:6.
4. We need to take a stand for righteousness and holiness and truth.
Exodus 32:25-29; Judges 4:17-24; Psalm 106:30-31; II Corinthians 6:14-18; 7:1; Jude 1:3.
5. The great and legitimate cry against Christianity is hypocrisy.
Exodus 32:25; I Sam 15:22; Prov 21:3; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8; Luke 12:1; Matt 23:23; Rom 2:17-24; James 2:1-10.
6. Any minister not condemning these sins is deceiving with vain words.
Jeremiah 23:9-21; Ezekiel 13:22; Joel 2:12-21; Micah 3:1-12; Ephesians 5:6; Revelation 3:14-22.
7. The Lord's people deserve and need clear instruction on this subject.
Ecclesiastes 8:11; Romans 12:17; I Corinthians 1:10; 14:33,40; Ephesians 4:14; I Timothy 3:15.

The Faith of God's Elect

1. **God is.**
Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 37:16; 45:18; Romans 1:19-21; Hebrews 11:6.
2. **God has revealed His will in the Holy Scriptures.**
Psalm 19:7-11; Proverbs 22:17-21; Jeremiah 23:25-32; Luke 4:4-12; II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:21.
3. **The King James Version Is the Holy Scriptures.**
Proverbs 8:6-9; Matthew 7:15-20; Romans 4:19-21; I Timothy 6:20-21; II Peter 1:19-21.
4. **Scripture is the absolute final authority for all church matters.**
Joshua 1:7-9; Psalm 119:128; Isaiah 8:20; Galatians 1:6-9; I Timothy 3:15; 6:3-5; II Timothy 3:16-17.
5. **Jesus Christ gave bishops (pastor-teachers) to rule His churches.**
Mark 13:34; Ephesians 4:8-16; I Timothy 3:15; 5:17; Titus 2:15; Hebrews 13:7,17.
6. **A church under its pastor owes allegiance or cooperation to no man.**
Isaiah 8:9-15; Acts 5:29; I Corinthians 12:27; II Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 2:22.
7. **Democracy – majority or mob rule – is neither of God or wise.**
Gen 18:19; Ex 23:2; Deut 34:9-12; Josh 24:15; I Sam 15:24; Eccl 10:5-7; Acts 13:20-22; I Cor 5:3-5; I Tim 3:4-5.
8. **Opinions and feelings of men are deceitful and foolish in pleasing God.**
Proverbs 16:25; 21:2; 28:26; Isaiah 55:6-11; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21; Luke 16:15; I Corinthians 2:14.
9. **Tradition, regardless of how long established or noble in origin, is vain.**
Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 119:98-100; Mark 7:5-13; Colossians 2:6-8,20-23; Titus 1:14; 3:9; I Peter 1:18.
10. **Sentimentality must be sacrificed for the glory of God and His Word.**
Exodus 32:26-29; Leviticus 19:15; Deut 13:6-11; 25:11-12; II Chronicles 15:16; Luke 14:26; I Timothy 5:21.
11. **Experience – the false wisdom of hindsight – is blinding and worth little.**
Job 32:1-14; Psalm 50:21-22; Proverbs 1:32; 16:31; 21:30; Eccl 7:14; 8:14; 9:1; John 7:24; Rom 2:4; I Cor 8:7.
12. **Personalities are dangerous and destructive to sound judgment.**
Deuteronomy 1:17; 16:19; Job 32:21-22; Psalm 118:8-9; Proverbs 29:25; I Cor 3:5-7; III John 1:9; Jude 1:16.

What Is Sin?

1. Sin is the transgression of God's law.
Romans 3:4; 4:15; 7:7; I John 3:4.
2. Therefore, sin is an offence against God.
Genesis 4:7; 39:9; II Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51:4; Luke 15:21; James 2:11.
3. Therefore, we identify sin by the law of God.
Psalm 119:96; Matthew 5:28; Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7,13; Galatians 3:10; James 2:10.
4. Therefore, only God can forgive sin.
Job 42:8; Psalm 51:1-9; Mark 2:5-12; I John 1:9.
5. God forgave sins legally upon Christ's atonement for them.
Isaiah 53:4-6,10-12; Matthew 1:21; II Cor 5:21; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 8:12; I Peter 2:24.
6. God forgives sin practically upon proper confession and repentance.
Job 33:27-28; Proverbs 28:13; I John 1:9.

Large Sins Are Against God

“If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?”

I Samuel 2:25

“Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.”

I Timothy 1:9-10

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

I Corinthians 6:9-10

“For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”

Ephesians 5:5-6

Small Sins Are Against Man

“If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?”

I Samuel 2:25

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?”

I Corinthians 6:1-3

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

Matthew 18:15

“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”

Matthew 18:21-22

“The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.”

Proverbs 19:11

Private Sins Are Known By a Few or Less

“But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

Matthew 5:28

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

I John 1:9

“Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.”

Matthew 1:19

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

James 5:19-20

Public Sins Are Known By Most or All

“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you.”

I Corinthians 5:1

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.”

Ephesians 5:3

Common. I. Of general, public, or non-private nature. 7. That is a matter of public talk or knowledge, generally known.

General. A. adj. 1. Including, participated in by, involving, or affecting, all, or nearly all, the parts of a specified whole.

Public. 5. Open to general observation, sight, or cognizance; existing, done, or made in public; manifest; not concealed.

Public sins are those generally known by most or all of the members of a church or community, whereby discipline is required to restore the integrity of the church. They have been named among the congregation, which is not to occur in churches of saints. Even very large sins against God may be dealt with privately, when they are known only by a few or a minority of a church.

All church members sin (I John 1:8,10), but not all church members sin in such a way as to create a public scandal. And this great difference is created by private examination and repentance before a sin can become public and the sovereign Providence of the holy God.

Can We Divide Sin?

	Small	Large
Private	<i>Small - Private</i>	<i>Large - Private</i>
Public	<i>Small - Public</i>	<i>Large - Public</i>

Can We Summarize?

Small

Large

Private

Matthew 18:15-16
I Corinthians 6:1-8

Galatians 6:1-2
James 5:19-20

Public

Matthew 18:16-17
I Corinthians 6:1-8

I Corinthians 5:1-11
Ephesians 5:1-3

Repentance or Obstinance?

1. Repentance is an important key to dealing with sin.
Job 34:31-32; Ezekiel 33:11,14-16; Luke 3:3; 15:7; II Corinthians 7:9-10.
2. Repentance admits the sin was wrong, perverse, and unprofitable; forsakes it altogether; and clears one's self zealously with new conduct.
Job 33:27-28; Proverbs 28:13; Luke 19:1-10; Acts 19:18-20; 26:20; II Corinthians 7:10-11.
3. Repentance must precede any forgiveness.
II Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 18:15; Acts 8:22; 26:18; Titus 3:10-11; I John 1:9.
4. Repentance is known by clear words and zealous conduct.
II Samuel 12:13; I Kings 21:25-29; Jonah 3:10; Matthew 3:8; II Corinthians 7:10-11.
5. True repentance is not easy.
Proverbs 1:24-32; 6:32; 29:1; II Timothy 2:25-26; Hebrews 3:12-13.
6. Obstinance brings God's judgment.
Leviticus 26:14-39; I Samuel 12:15; Proverbs 1:24-31; 29:1; Ezekiel 20:39; Malachi 2:2; Revelation 2:21-23.

Three Questions to Ask

1. Is the sin LARGE (against God) or SMALL (against man)?
2. Is the sin PUBLIC (commonly known) or PRIVATE (mostly unknown)?
3. Is the sinner REPENTANT or OBSTINATE?

Eight Possible Situations

When you have three questions with two possible answers for each question, then there are a total of eight possible combinations or situations. Every sin in a church falls into one of eight possible situations.

Repentance

Small – Private
Small – Public
Large – Private
Large – Public

Obstinance

Small - Private
Small - Public
Large - Private
Large - Public

What about Small Sins? - 1

1. They are offences between brothers not large enough to be listed as sins in New Testament terminology. They are personal trespasses against another person. They are not sins against God. They are small issues creating personal offence.
2. These matters are covered by Matthew 18:15-17 and I Corinthians 6:1-8 as trespasses by a brother and called the smallest matters pertaining to this life.
3. Consider a few examples:
 - a. You loan a tool, and it is returned damaged.
 - b. A sister dents your car in the church parking lot.
 - c. A brother hires your son and then lays him off.
 - d. A sister remarks that your car is older than the hills.
 - e. A brother will not allow your son to date his daughter.
4. They are preferably handled with gracious oversight (Prov 19:11) or Christian charity (I Cor 13:4-7). Godly men would rather suffer defrauding than confront and punish a brother (I Cor 6:7). This is the most glorious way to deal with them.
5. If you choose to cover a transgression in charity, then you must not and cannot bear any grudge or bitterness over the matter. It must be covered and forgotten.
6. If you choose to use Matthew 18:15 to confront the offending brother, it should be kept a private matter between you and him alone (Prov 25:9).
7. If he will not hear you, and you are still offended, then you are to take one or two more as witnesses to confirm the matter and every word of the exchange.
8. At any stage of the Matthew 18 process, you may choose to bury the matter and simply forgive the offender and forget it.
9. If it comes to the church, judgment is by a simple majority with the pastor having one vote. Christ Jesus has not ruled in such small matters, so the church makes its own binding judgment. In case of a tie, the pastor decides the matter. The minority also submits to the judgment or is guilty of public variance themselves.

What about Small Sins? - 2

10. If the guilty party refuses to hear the church, he is excluded from the communion of the church for variance in the same way as those guilty of large offences (I Corinthians 5:1-11).
11. If the guilty party hears the church and resolves the matter satisfactorily, he is saved and the matter ends forever. Even though the private offence has become thoroughly public, the repenting offender may be saved and retained in the membership because the issue at stake is the smallest matter of this life.

What about Large Sins?

1. These are large offences condemned in the New Testament as sins and action contrary to sound doctrine that cannot inherit the kingdom of God. They are not matters of personal offence, but rather violations of God's rules for our lives as taught in the New Testament. The Old Testament ceremonial law does not apply, and its moral laws should only be used to explain and define New Testament sins.
2. If observed privately in a brother, he should be warned and converted from the error of his way. This duty is taught in Galatians 6:1-2; I Thessalonians 5:14; James 5:19-20. This is the glorious work of true soul winning as defined in the New Testament for saints. Rather than rejoicing in another's iniquity (I Cor 13:6), true charity rejoices in meekly converting and restoring a brother to righteousness.
3. If the brother will hear you and repents of his error, then you have saved a soul from death God's way and hid a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20). The death here is the same as in Proverbs 23:13-14; Luke 15:24; I Cor 11:30; and James 1:15; and the sins are hidden by godly repentance (I Peter 4:8). The matter ends right there forever. The sins are forgiven by God; hidden from man; and a reputation saved.
4. If the brother will not hear you, then the pastor should be informed to assist in privately recovering him from the error of his way (Deut 13:12-18; Pr 25:2). It is not whispering or backbiting to inform the pastor for the purpose of salvation and recovery (I Cor 1:11). He has a right to know as ruler of the congregation.
5. If the brother will not hear the pastor, then the pastor must make the matter public for church judgment. This would be an occasion to use a public rebuke as indicated by Paul (I Tim 5:20). The church would then deal with the sin as a large, public sin directly comparable to the fornicator at Corinth (I Cor 5:1-11).
6. If a large sin of this type becomes public knowledge by ordinary circumstances, then it also is dealt with according to Paul's clear and simple instructions to Corinth (I Cor 5:1-11).
7. These large sins against God that become public knowledge in a church must be dealt with by putting the sinner from the congregation. There is no examination, discussion of details, consideration of repentance, or voting. The sinner is put out.

What about Small-Private Sins?

- Definition:** These are personal offences between two brothers that might be settled in court by the world. They are often only known by the offender and offended and maybe their families.
- Example:** Brother Randy Jones borrows a jigsaw from Brother Sam Smith. When he returns the jig saw, the power cord has been torn from the saw. Brother Smith is offended at the treatment of his saw. What should he do?
- Scripture:**
- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Proverbs 19:11 | I Corinthians 6:1-8 |
| Matthew 18:15 | Proverbs 25:9 |
| Matthew 5:23-25 | Proverbs 11:13 |
- Action:** If Brother Smith is a glorious Christian, he may overlook the offence and forget it (Pr 19:11; I Cor 6:7; 13:4-7). If he cannot do so, he should go alone to Brother Jones to seek resolution (Matt 18:15; Prov 25:9). He should not share his offence with any others (Prov 11:13).
- Repentance:** If Brother Jones is an honest brother, he will repent and resolve the matter to Brother Smith's complete satisfaction (Matt 18:15; 5:23-25). Brother Smith should forgive Brother Jones completely and the matter ends right there forever without any others knowing.
- Obstinance:** If Brother Jones rejects Brother Smith's complaint and refuses making restitution, then Brother Smith may choose to return with witnesses. If Brother Jones continues in obstinance, then Brother Smith may bring it before the church. If Brother Jones heeds the church's resolution, then the matter ends forever. If he will not heed the church, then he is excluded for public variance as in large sins.

What about Small-Public Sins?

- Definition:** These are small matters of offence between brothers or sisters that have reached the congregation for judgment. The offended party has attempted satisfaction privately and with witnesses, and now he brings it to the church for their judgment.
- Example:** Brother Smith has been unable to receive any satisfaction from Brother Jones regarding the power cord on his jigsaw. Until now the matter has been known only by a few in the congregation. But now Brother Smith asks his pastor to let the congregation judge in the matter. Is this a Scriptural practice?
- Scripture:** Matthew 18:15-17
I Corinthians 6:1-8
Matthew 5:23-25
- Repentance:** If Brother Jones is moved by the church's concern and equitable judgment, and satisfies Brother Smith as specified, then he may be retained in the church. A brother has been won. He is not excluded, even though his offence is public, because it ranked as one of the smallest matters of this life.
- Obstinance:** If Brother Jones rejects the judgment of the church, then he must be excluded and treated as a heathen man and a publican. At this stage, he is guilty of public variance, sedition, strife, implacability, and wickedness at least.

What about Large-Private Sins?

- Definition:** These are sins against God the New Testament declares cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven and are clear grounds for exclusion if made public, but they are known only by a few.
- Example:** Sister Susie Smith has been dating Brother Tommy Jones. They are both members of the church along with their parents. Having fornicated on a date and being convicted about it, they humbly inform their parents as to their folly and ask for permission to get married as soon as possible. The family calls the pastor for advice. The parents approve of the marriage, but they want to honor the Lord in the way they handle the situation.
- Scripture:** Galatians 6:1-2
James 5:16,19-20
I Thessalonians 5:14
Romans 15:1
- Repentance:** Since the two sinners have shown repentance, they should be forgiven, comforted, encouraged, and required to marry. This is private action between two families. The sin should be buried and not revealed to anyone.
- Obstinance:** If the two were caught in fornication and did not show repentance, they should be reported to the pastor after having been rebuked and warned. The pastor is then responsible to make inquisition, labor to convert them, or make the sin known publicly for judgment if repentance is not obtained.

What about Large-Public Sins?

Definition: These are sins against God the New Testament declares cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. These are not matters of personal offence but rather of serious violation of God's Word. The offence is known generally within and/or without the congregation.

Example: Sister Jane Doe gets fed up with her husband Brother John Doe and leaves him. Brother John and the pastor make repeated efforts to recover her over two weeks, while relatively few are aware of the problem; but soon the word leaks out that she has deserted her husband, and the whole church is aware of the situation. What should the pastor do?

Scripture:	I Corinthians 5:1-11	II Thessalonians 3:6,14
	I Corinthians 6:9-10	Romans 16:17-18
	Galatians 5:19-21	Galatians 1:8-9
	Ephesians 5:3-5	
	Romans 1:29-31	

The sins in the five passages on the left may be combined to form a master list by the use of "such" and the common sins among them.

Action: Since Sister Doe's desertion is a sin against God (covenantbreaking at least) and is publicly known, she must be put out of the church for the Lord to judge her. There is no room for recovery, since the matter is large against God and of common report.

Repentance: Even if she returns to her husband prior to the exclusion and shows remorse for her folly, she must still be excluded, since it is a public offence against Christ. Paul made no reference to examining the fornicator's spirit in I Corinthians 5. When a brother or sister is identified in public sin, he must be removed from the Lord's table until he has cleared himself.

Obstinance: The sinner must be excluded, since it is an offence to the Lord and violates the purity of the Lord's table.

Can We Summarize?

With Repentance

Small

Large

Private

Offender satisfies the offended party, and the matter is ended with no other persons knowing.

Offender repents to God after warning reproof and matter is ended with no others knowing.

Public

Offender submits to the church's judgment and the matter ends with membership retained.

Offender is excluded from the church and warned to clear himself with godly repentance.

Can We Summarize?

Without Repentance

	Small	Large
Private	<i>Offended brings witnesses to confront offender. If obstinance continues, then offended brings matter to the church.</i>	<i>Knowing brother rebukes and warns offender and informs pastor. Pastor has duty to search it out, convert him, or make it public.</i>
Public	<i>Offender is excluded from the church for rejecting its judgment.</i>	<i>Offender is excluded to purify the communion, promote salvation, and clear church reputation.</i>

What Are the Large Sins? - 1

1. The master list of all offences is contained in these five passages:

Romans 1:29-31
I Corinthians 5:11
I Corinthians 6:9-10
Galatians 5:19-21
Ephesians 5:3-5

2. Any other similar sin by virtue of the demonstrative word “such” and the general and inclusive sins of unrighteousness and wickedness contained in the list.
3. Paul also established his apostolic tradition for church members (II Thes 2:15; 3:6), which includes the following sins among others:

Diligent labor in gainful labor (I Thes 4:11-12; II Thess 3:7-12).
Long hair on otherwise masculine men (I Corinthians 11:7,14).
Short hair on otherwise feminine women (I Corinthians 11:6,10,15).
Forsaking the assemblies of the church (Hebrews 10:23-25).
Providing financially for one’s wide family (I Timothy 5:8).
Sexually defrauding one’s marriage partner (I Corinthians 7:5).
Proper submission to civil powers and payment of taxes (Rom 13:1-7).
Marrying an unbeliever or obvious carnal believer (I Cor 7:39-40).

Pastoral Judgment and Rule

It is a fact that many of the sins condemned in the New Testament as not inheriting the kingdom of God are, or can be, quite subjective. That is, they require a varying measure of interpretation and judgment to determine adequate guilt for church discipline.

For example, consider forsaking the assembly. It is a large sin against God by comparing Hebrews 10:25 with II Thessalonians 3:6. But how many services must one miss to be guilty of this sin? And what excuses are allowable for missing services?

In a congregation there will be some offended after a few absences and others will have enough mercy or complacency to wait for years. How is the judgment made to judge the sin? Who makes the decision and calls the church to obey?

For example, consider covetousness. It is a large sin against God by numerous verses in the New Testament. How is it determined? At what point is it finally judged? Who defines its breach? Who applies the Scripture to prove a case of covetousness? What conduct or circumstances truly create an act or spirit of covetousness?

For example, consider stealing. It is a large sin against God by I Corinthians 6:10. Must a person be found guilty in a court of law of the civil authority before the church of Jesus Christ judges this sin? Or is there another mechanism to judge this sin? What about theft never discovered by the civil authority? What about theft overlooked by the civil authority? Who makes the judgments in such subjective matters?

God has called his ministers under both testaments to make such judgments. In the Old Testament, Levites, priest, and judges ruled between statutes and precepts (Deut 17:8-13; II Chron 19:8-10; Ezek 44:23-24). In the New Testament, bishops rule in corresponding matters (I Tim 3:5; 5:17; Heb 13:7,17).

Since a pastor cannot exclude a sinner himself, even for large sins against God, it is his responsibility to determine the case and present it to the church following the process already described. If private repentance can be obtained, then the church never knows about it. If not, then the matter is brought to the church for congregational exclusion.

Will Another Example Help?

Situation: Brother John Brown, a seventeen-year-old church member, comes home drunk after a party with friends and is discovered by his father, who is also a church member.

Solution: Is it a large matter? Yes, drunkenness is a sin against God and included in Paul's lists of sins forfeiting the kingdom of heaven (Gal 5:21).

Is it a private matter? Yes, only John, his father, and a few friends know about it. It is not of "common report."

Is John repentant to God and before his father?

If he is repentant, then the sin should be covered. It should not be revealed to anyone. His confession to God is sufficient to obtain full forgiveness. The Scriptural basis for this treatment is Galatians 6:1-2 and James 5:19-20. What about John's friends? True repentance will clear a man and the gospel of reproach. His friends will know either by his admonition or his forsaking their company that such conduct was wrong.

If he is not repentant, then he should be rebuked and warned by his father. If repentance is not obtained, John's father should inform the pastor of the situation. If the pastor cannot obtain repentance and the matter is certain, then John should be publicly rebuked and excluded for his drunkenness. The Scriptural basis for this treatment of public sins is I Corinthians 5:1-11 and Ephesians 5:3.

Will Another Example Help?

Situation: Sister Julie Smith, a twenty-year-old church member, committed fornication during high school. Now she is engaged to Brian Edwards, who is also a church member. Only Julie and her parents know about the old sin.

Solution: Is it a large matter? Yes, fornication is a sin against God and included in Paul's lists of sins forfeiting the kingdom of heaven (I Cor 5:11; 6:9).

Is it a private matter? Yes, only Julie and her parents and an ungodly boy know about the old sin.

Is Julie repentant to God and before her parents for it? Yes, she freely acknowledged her guilt when confronted and broke off the ungodly relationship with the boy at school.

Should Julie wear a white dress at her wedding? Yes, because (1) it is not an absolute rule of society or Scripture to do otherwise and (2) she is under no obligation to reveal her previous sin, which has been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ and her repentance. The Scriptural basis for this action is Job 33:27-28; Matthew 1:19; James 5:19-20; and I John 1:9.

Should she tell John when he asks if she is a virgin? Yes, because (1) John has asked a specific question raising a controversy, (2) he has the Scriptural and natural right and need to know, and (3) the matter can still remain concealed with four or five parties knowing. The Scriptural basis for this action is Exodus 20:16 and Deuteronomy 22:13-21.

What if Julie had not repented when her parents had discovered it and confronted her? She would have been reported to the pastor, who then could have made it public for judgment, if repentance and conversion were not obtained.

What if Julie had become pregnant as a result of this high school fornication? Since Julie was not married, this would be an obvious act of God revealing the sin. It could not be hid, even if she had godly sorrow for it. She would have to be excluded for a large, public sin.

Will Another Example Help?

Situation: Sister Sally Smith tells three other sisters in the church that the pastor received a speeding ticket the week before. The story is true. One of the three sisters, Brenda White, reports this act of gossiping to the pastor's wife.

Solution: Is there an offence? Yes, Sister Sally whispered to her three friends, and Brenda White has whispered to the pastor's wife.

Is it a large matter? Yes, whispering is a sin against God and included in Paul's lists of sins forfeiting the kingdom of heaven (Romans 1:29).

It is a private matter? Yes, since it is limited to just a few members in the congregation.

The pastor's wife should rebuke Brenda for whispering to her, obtain her conversion from this fault, and admonish her to go and convert Sally as soon as possible. If these actions are followed, with Sally correcting the matter with each of the three women, then the issue can be buried and forgotten.

If at any point in this process, either Brenda or Sally refuse to repent and correct their sin, then the pastor may be informed with the right and duty to seek repentance and conversion or expose it for public judgment.

Many think that whispering is a little sin and murder, fornication, and hating God are large sins, but the Word of God includes them all in the same list of the works of a God-forsaken reprobate and joins them together with the demonstrative pronoun "such" (Romans 1:28-32).

Will Another Example Help?

Situation: Brother Bobby Brister has missed all church services for four weeks.

Solution: We possibly have a sin here, for Paul stated by apostolic authority in Hebrews 10:25 that forsaking church assemblies was contrary to his rule. And as such, we understand this to be a large sin. We showed earlier that apostolic authority was sufficient grounds for exclusion (II Thess 2:15; 3:6,14).

Forsaking the assembly is what we may call a subjective (philosophy), continuous (mathematics), or judgment (common sense) action. Such actions require interpretation as to the extent of the guilt of the offender.

Some sins are settled facts i.e. murder, stealing, heresy, covenantbreakers, haters of God, idolatry, and witchcraft. Other sins require the pastor's judgment as to their identification and the extent of the person's guilt. It is the pastor who judges in such cases. He decides by the Spirit of God in light of God's Word, when a situation has become sinful.

As the bishop is the overseer of the congregation, it is his duty and priority to search out such matters and determine Brother Bobby's problem. If he cannot obtain sufficient reasons and/or private repentance for his absences, then he has the obligation of office under Christ to bring this matter to the church for exclusion.

What Is Exclusion?

1. It is publicly identifying a sinner, putting him out of the church membership, and ending his access to the Lord's table by unanimous corporate action (I Cor 5:1-13).
2. It is most fully described in I Corinthians 5:1-13, where Paul instructs the church at Corinth to exclude the fornicator.
3. It is further described by the terms of separation found in Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17-18; II Thessalonians 3:6,14-15.
4. It is putting him outside the hedge of the church, where God will judge him.
5. It is turning him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh – his carnal lusts, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus – Christ at His coming.
6. It's primary intent is the purity of the Lord's body at the communion table; it's secondary intent is the salvation of the sinning brother.
7. It is a punishment inflicted by many – the rest of the congregation (II Cor 2:6).
8. It is not a vote, since the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Head of the church, has already determined what sins are allowed and what sins are not allowed.
9. The pastor cannot exclude anyone, as it is a congregational action. The pastor should direct the congregation to their duty, but it is the church that must exclude.

How Are Excluded Brethren Treated?

1. They are to be clearly identified (Rom 16:17; II Thess 3:14).
2. We are not to keep company with them (I Corinthians 5:9-11).
3. We are to avoid them (Romans 16:17-18).
4. We are not to eat meals with them (I Corinthians 5:9-11 cp 10:27).
5. We are to withdraw from them (II Thessalonians 3:6).
6. We are to avoid normal social activity with them (II Thessalonians 3:14).
7. Our treatment must leave them ashamed (II Thessalonians 3:14).
8. Our treatment must not be vindictive or revengeful (II Thessalonians 3:15).
9. Our treatment must include brotherly admonition (II Thessalonians 3:15).
10. Our treatment is a punishment (II Corinthians 2:6).
11. It does not include forgiveness, comfort, or love (II Corinthians 2:7-8).
12. Necessary relationships such as marriage, family, or employment are not made void, so there are obvious differences in this treatment from one person to another.
13. Further differences should be shown based on the degree of repentance and wisdom manifested. If a man persists in his folly in a scornful way against God, then he should be dealt with as a fool (Proverbs 9:6-9; 14:7; 22:10; Matt 7:6).
14. It does not preclude a person from attending assemblies, for the intent of exclusion is the salvation of the excluded party. They should be showing zeal in attendance to clear themselves of their guilt.

What Is Restoration?

1. It is restoring an excluded member to full fellowship, forgiveness, affection, and comfort, after they have cleared themselves from their sin by godly repentance. It is the opposite of exclusion. It is the end of their time of punishment outside the church. It is the receiving of an excluded sinner back into the communion of the church and the baptism of their soul by the Spirit once again into the body. It includes all the actions and consequences occurring at original membership.
2. It is most fully described in II Corinthians 2:6-8, where Paul instructs the church at Corinth to restore the excluded fornicator from I Corinthians 5:1-13. Contrary to the way they had been treating him (shunning and admonishing), they were now to receive him again and console and encourage him with affection and forgiveness.
3. Restoration is a congregational action directed by the pastor. As exclusion was the action of the many (II Cor 2:6), so restoration is the action of the many; it is a congregational ordinance. The pastor must bear responsibility for the judgment as to when this occurs and lead the church to the godly action, but it is the unanimous action of the whole church that restores a member.
4. It is not a vote, for the whole congregation should be agreed that the offender has cleared himself completely. God has determined what offences require exclusion, and He has recorded them in great detail for us. He has also determined His appointed ambassador – the bishop, and he is able to discern by the Spirit and Word when a man should be recovered.
5. In order to mirror the celebration in heaven (Luke 15:7,10), it is certainly appropriate to show this confirmation of love, forgiveness, and comfort with a godly celebration (II Cor 2:7-8). Can any forbid a fatted calf, robe, or ring to such persons, that we might appear as spiritually minded as our Lord and those in heaven?

When Does Restoration Occur?

1. When the punishment has been sufficient to destroy the flesh, prove godly repentance, and has potential of harming a person with grief (II Corinthians 2:6-8) is the time to restore a brother to the congregation.
2. Godly repentance unto salvation indicating the possibility of restoration is extreme, obvious, and altogether clears one (II Corinthians 7:10-11; Job 33:27-28; Luke 19:1-10). Such godly sorrow and repentance is not easy; it is a gift of God.
3. The key is II Corinthians 2:7 and the words “overmuch sorrow.” The minimum duration is determined by the word “sorrow,” which Paul defines as that conduct clearing one from the charge of wrongdoing. The maximum duration is determined by the word “overmuch,” which Paul defines as potentially swallowing a man in excessive grief.
4. Every father has sufficient wisdom for applying similar discipline at home. He should punish the children sufficiently to drive the foolishness from them (Pr 22:15; 23:13-14); and yet he must limit the punishment to avoid provoking or discouraging them (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21).
5. Church discipline must be severe enough to work the salvation of godly sorrow (I Cor 5:5; II Cor 7:10-11); and yet it must be limited enough to avoid destroying a man for whom Christ died (II Cor 10:8; 13:10).
6. The pastor, as Christ’s ruler in the congregation, directs the church to restore an excluded member, when he judges Christ’s standards have been met. This is not so different from receiving a public sinner upon repentance as a first time member. Jerusalem had trouble with Paul, but accepted ministerial judgment (Acts 9:26-28).
7. The arbitrary and superstitious minimum of a year is neither Scriptural nor wise. Some sinners could be cleared in less than a year (like Zacchaeus), and others may require decades depending on their zeal and the nature of their sin. Whether there is one year or five years between the Corinthian epistles and whether the fornicator repented for one month or five years cannot be proven from Scripture. To establish a hard and fast rule from these unnatural connections creates an artificial standard for church discipline and a precedent for speculative interpretations.

Is It Right to Cover Sin?

1. If the sin is private (known only by a few or the minority), and . . .
2. If godly repentance has been clearly shown . . .
3. Then sin should be covered (hid and concealed from public view).
4. This is true whether it be a small (against man) or large (against God) sin.
5. Such covering of sin should be the reflex action of godly, spiritual Christians. The fervent desire of a redeemed heart taught by the Spirit of God is to forgive others, as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us so freely and completely.
6. Such action is the express commandment of God in the Scriptures (I Peter 4:8; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; Luke 6:37; James 2:13).
7. Every marriage and family observes this procedure on a weekly basis. The sins occurring in the privacy of a marriage and family are not announced every Sunday to the rest of the church. When a wife sins and repents to her husband, or a child sins and repents to his parents, the matter is forgiven and covered from others.
8. If we suspend this procedure, then we should suspend it consistently for all sins. The consequence of such a suspension would be a public confession each Sunday of every member's sins from the previous week. This is heresy and absurd.
9. If we suspend this procedure, then we end up promoting whispering, slander, hatred, malice, and other sins of defamation of character contrary to Scripture, which is the violation of the sixth and/or ninth commandments of the great God.

What Do We Mean By Covering Sin?

Covering sin is concealing or keeping a private sin secret and not revealing it to others, when proper repentance has been shown. It is protecting the reputation of another, when they have been converted from their error by godly repentance.

If a person has truly repented and converted concerning a private sin, no matter how heinous or horrible it may be in the opinion of others, they are to be forgiven and restored to righteous living. Bringing such sins before the church is unscriptural and absurd. Those sins should be buried and forgotten. It is unscriptural, for God's Word declares repentance and conversion are sufficient for hiding sins and justifying personal restoration. It is absurd, for all men are such sinners, if the truth were ever known. If the thoughts, words, and private sins of all were exposed, no man or woman could stand. And the day of judgment will bear this out, when every secret thing shall be revealed.

Consider the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who inspired the New Testament account of Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Gideon, Samson, and David in Hebrews 11 to hide and cover their lack of faith and sometimes grievous sins. Shall we not honor the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanseth from all sin, by covering and hiding confessed sins ourselves?

1. Proper repentance and conversion must be shown (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).
2. The sin should be forgotten (Proverbs 17:9; I Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:32).
3. The sin should not be revealed to others (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9; I Timothy 5:13).
4. Revealing the matter is whispering and talebearing (Lev 19:16; Prov 11:13; 20:19), which are by New Testament order excludable offences if known publicly.

Does God Cover Sin?

1. God covered Adam and Eve after their sin (Genesis 3:1-21).
 - a. Their sin brought the shame of nakedness (3:7).
 - b. They temporarily covered it with fig leaves (3:7).
 - c. They hid from God due to their nakedness (3:8-10).
 - d. God permanently covered their shame with skins (3:21).
 - e. God covered the shame of sin even between husband and wife.
 - f. Innocent blood was shed by God to provide this covering.
2. It is His glory to cover sin.
 - a. He covers all the sin of His people (Psalm 85:2).
 - b. It is His glory to conceal things (Proverbs 25:2).
 - c. He casts our sins behind His back (Isaiah 38:17).
 - d. He will not remember our sins (Isaiah 43:25).
3. Jesus covered sin.
 - a. He often said, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” He did not reveal specifics, ask for details, or demand a public confession, etc.
 - b. Jesus neither condemned nor demanded a public confession from the woman of Samaria (John 4:16-18), though she was guilty of great sexual sins.
 - c. The woman taken in adultery was warned to sin no more, but she was not condemned as many would demand (John 8:1-11).
 - d. The thief on the cross was promised eternal glory without any demand for a description of details or public confession (Luke 23:43).
 - e. How else but through the blood of Christ are David, Samson, and other sinners included in the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11)?
4. The everlasting covenant includes the forgetting of sins.
 - a. The Lord will not remember our sins and iniquities (Hebrews 8:12).
 - b. Our consciences are now free from the condemning guilt of sin.

Is It Scriptural to Cover Sin?

1. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1-2).
2. “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).
3. “Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins” (Proverbs 10:12).
4. “An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire” (Proverbs 16:27).
5. “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Proverbs 17:9).
6. “Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (I Corinthians 13:7).
7. “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (I Peter 4:8).

What About . . . Matthew 18?

Question: Must I handle every personal offence with other brethren by confrontation according to the directions of Matthew 18:15-17?

Answer: No. The superior method of handling personal offences is gloriously passing over them (Prov 19:11), suffering, bearing, and enduring them in charity (I Cor 13:4-7), and returning good for evil (Romans 12:21).

It is better to take wrong and suffer defrauding than to confront and fight for your rights (I Cor 6:7). The Lord Jesus taught us to not resist evil in these smallest of matters (Matthew 5:38-42).

The instruction of Matthew 18:15-17 should be followed only when the offence is such that you cannot pass over it. It should be a last resort rather than a reflex action. You should only exercise your options here when you cannot forgive and forget a personal matter.

What About . . . 70 times 7?

Question: How can we exclude a repenting sinner when Jesus said to forgive him 490 (70 x 7) times?

Answer: The context of this statement are those small, personal trespasses that arise between brethren (Matthew 18:15-17 compared with 18:21-22). This directive does not apply to sins against God.

Public sins of a large nature are not to be forgiven but rather excluded according to the commandment of Paul to the church at Corinth (I Cor 5:1-11). And he adds further instruction in Romans 16:17 and II Thess 3:6,14.

Should a church forgive and overlook a brother repenting of sodomy every Sunday morning? Seventy times seven would cover almost ten years of weekly confession and forgiveness. Of course not! You cannot believe repentance that does not forsake a sin (Matthew 3:8; II Corinthians 7:11).

What About . . . One Year? - 1

Question: Should we exclude sinners for one year according to our past tradition?

Answer: Some few compare I Cor 16:3 with II Cor 8:10 and 9:1-5 and conclude there is one year between the writing of these two epistles. That there is a minimum of one year no man should deny. But it may have been longer.

From this notion, they further speculate the fornicator was repentant for the whole year. And from Paul's forgiveness of him in the second epistle, they conclude one year of godly repentance is necessary for restoration.

These speculations are then combined to create a major rule of church order and an interpretational method contrary to Paul's plain methods (II Cor 1:13). Such an indirect method of interpretation and rejection of the spiritual judgment of a pastor and church confuses the nature of godly repentance.

Why not assume because of the present distress (I Cor 7:26) Paul was more lenient than usual, and we should actually keep them out for two years in our present peaceful situation?

We do not use the Bible in such a way. Nothing has been proven; disconnected and unrelated facts are forced together; and the evangelical intent of exclusion has been confused.

These same interpreters connect Methusaleh's counting ability with Revelation 7:9 to determine the minimum attendance in heaven; they explain "the form of sound words" (II Tim 1:13) as the left and right justification in printed Bibles; and they apply the "dry tree" of Isaiah 56:3 to prove the eunuch (Acts 8:37) became a member of the Jerusalem Church by means of his baptism in the desert.

Church judgment is to save the spirit of the sinner, while destroying his flesh (I Cor 5:5). Its minimum duration must show godly sorrow that clears the sinner, and its maximum duration cannot cause grief leading to destruction.

What About . . . One Year? - 2

It is almost impossible to keep one year from becoming the standard rather than godly repentance, for the subjective judgment of repentance and clearing is reduced in importance to exalt the duration of one calendar year. What level of repentance is required for the year? Must it be consistent throughout? Should the year be extended for any weak periods? When does the year begin?

Full clearing of one's self may take far less than a year or may take far longer than a year depending on the nature of the offence and the fervency of the repentance. Zacchaeus proved his godly repentance in one day by his public restitution and great charity. Jesus Christ acknowledged it as salvation that very day (Luke 19:1-10). There are different kinds of repentance (II Cor 7:9-10) and different degrees of repentance, which weigh far heavier in clearing an individual than the passing of a year.

As fathers know how much to chasten their children without discouraging or angering them (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21), so pastors know when a sinner has been cleared and should be restored before being destroyed with grief (II Cor 2:7).

What About . . . a Split Vote?

Question: What should a church do when they have a split vote in a discipline case?

Answer: A church does not “vote” to exclude. It is not the church’s duty or right to determine judgment in large sins against God. Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, has already judged and given His judgment in the Scriptures. It is the church’s duty to simply obey His commandments and exclude offenders.

The church is not a democracy but a monarchy with Jesus Christ as King. The idea of congregational rule is neither Scriptural nor wise in large matters, and the church must be unified to execute His sentence (I Cor 1:10).

Paul’s instructions to the church at Corinth do not contain any provisions for a “vote” (I Cor 5:1-11). He told the church what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. Pastors following Paul will do the same thing. Church judgment is not arbitrary, since Jesus Christ stated His judgment already in Scripture.

The “punishment which was inflicted on many” (II Cor 2:7) is exclusion from the Lord’s table and the fellowship of the body. The church does this together with one mind to show their unified obedience to Jesus Christ.

Persons abstaining or disagreeing are guilty of variance against Christ. They would then be guilty of a large sin and needing exclusion themselves.

A church does not assemble to vote on whether Jimmy Johnson should be excluded or not for wearing a dress. God has already judged in this matter. The matter should not be brought to the church until it is certain and public, therefore there is no need for any deliberation or vote of any kind.

The doctrine of God our Saviour is perfectly righteous in its demands and judgments. Man does not equate whispering, jesting, and covetousness with idolatry, adultery, murder, and sedition; but God does.

In a Matthew 18 small matter, the congregational judgment may be a split vote as long as the minority party submits to the majority. There can be a difference in this judgment by virtue of the fact that the offence itself being considered is insufficient for exclusion, for it is one of the smallest matters.

What About . . . Pastors Excluding?

Question: Can a pastor abuse church discipline and become a dictator in a church?

Answer: Exclusion of members, as reception of new members, is a congregational action, not a ministerial action. Exclusion is a punishment inflicted by many (II Cor 2:6) rather than by one or a few.

No exclusion should ever take place in a church without (1) clear statements of Scripture and (2) clear evidence as to the nature and proof of the offence. The pastor is only to call for and direct the exclusion; the congregation must actually agree together to put the offender out.

A congregation that has been taught the proper use of their Bibles will not be taken advantage of by a pastor acting as a lord over God's heritage. The Scriptures are the protection (Acts 17:11; I Thess 5:21).

What About . . . Excluded Brethren?

Question: How should excluded brethren be treated?

Answer: They are to be marked, avoided, and admonished. Friendly relations including fellowship, love, and comfort are to be denied until restoration. Consider Matt 18:17; Rom 16:17-18; I Corinthians 5:11; II Thess 3:6,14-15.

Necessary relationships such as marriage, family, or employment are not made void, so there are obvious differences in this treatment from one to another. But such official relationships and necessary company do not nullify some measure of practical shunning of the excluded person.

Further differences should be shown based on the degree of repentance and wisdom manifested. If a man is persisting in his folly in a scornful way against God, then he should be dealt with as a fool (Proverbs 14:7; 22:10). If a man is duly ashamed and grieving for his sin and exercising godly repentance, then such a man deserves encouragement with his admonition.

What About . . . A Bishop or Deacon?

Question: Must not a minister make his private sins public due to his public office?

Answer: If this were practiced, how many ministers would there be? And how highly would they be esteemed? Ministers are but men with the same temptations as others. Far from being exempt from temptation to sin, they likely receive the greater Satanic attacks.

A minister, other than his office, is as other members in a congregation. He should receive the same treatment as other members, except that accusations against a minister should be made very carefully (I Timothy 5:19).

Ministers sin as do other men, and they should receive the same treatment as others when overtaken in a private fault. They should be converted back to the truth and their sins hid.

Did David make his adultery and murder public? Did they affect his ministry? He prayed that God would restore him to his previous effectiveness as a teacher (Psalm 51:13).

Did Peter make his denial of Jesus Christ public? Did it affect his ministry? He wept bitterly for his sin, and Christ shortly thereafter commissioned him to feed His sheep (John 21:15-16). On the day of Pentecost, Peter was the leader of apostles and disciples alike (Acts 1:15).

Judgment should not be compromised to protect a minister, but neither should a minister face a different standard of discipline than the rest of the congregation. While a minister has greater responsibility before Christ for his position, this does not affect the church dealing with him as a member.

A minister's private sins are against God, not against his office. There is no sin against an office. The only limitation on a minister's private sins being covered is repentance and conversion as all other members.

If a minister sins publicly, he should be treated as the other members. He should be excluded. In addition, and in consequence, he must relinquish his church office until he has cleared himself to be blameless once again.

What About . . . One Witness?

Question: What if there is only one witness against an offender, and he denies the accusation?

Answer: No judgment is ever to be considered without two or more witnesses regardless of the crime (Deut 19:15). Hearsay from one witness should be totally disregarded by everyone other than the pastor. God's appointed rulers are expected to search out hearsay (Deut 13:12-18; Proverbs 25:2).

A person may witness against themselves or be sworn to it in spite of our nation's Bill of Rights (Leviticus 5:1; Matthew 26:63).

What About . . . Sin to Cover Sin?

Question: Should sin be covered regardless of what is required or results? Should a person lie to cover sin?

Answer: Sin should not be committed to cover sin.

Every spiritual man will have the Christian reflex to cover sin for which there is true repentance. It will be an automatic response that is taught in the heart by the Spirit of Christ and recorded plainly on the pages of Scripture by the same Spirit. However, when encountering a situation compromising truth or principle, a faithful Christian cannot cover it any longer.

For example, a Christian that has been convicted of a felony faces a difficult situation when completing an employment application. Should he tell the truth and possibly miss the job? Or should he lie to gain the job, since he has repented for the sin? He should surely tell the truth and trust the Lord to provide the job. The employer is (1) asking a specific question and (2) has the right and need for an honest answer. However, a Christian would not be obligated to provide such information on his resume (Proverbs 29:11).

Full disclosure will hardly ever be required in any circumstance, and the child of God is not under obligation to reveal everything all the time. See the following question and answer about "half-truths."

What About . . . “Half-Truths”? - 1

Question: Covering sin may sometimes require making less than a full disclosure. Is not a “half-truth” a full lie?

Answer: A “half-truth” is not a full lie. A “half-truth” is full truth in a specific context.

Solomon taught the wisdom of not revealing every thing a person might know (Prov 29:11). Wise men tell “half-truths.” What did you say the last time you were asked how you were doing? You said you were “fine,” and there were things in your life that were not “fine.” What did you say when you were asked about Aunt Millie’s new hairdo? Did you answer that it was “interesting,” while wondering if she had it done at the School for the Blind?

Our own courts (the most righteous on earth) don’t expect you to tell everything you know under questioning, even though you swore to tell “the whole truth.” Consider how witnesses are often (1) told to only answer the questions asked by the attorneys, (2) asked by the judge to keep their answers to the questions, and (3) have any extra remarks “stricken” from the record and the minds of the jury.

Jesus once pretended with two disciples (Luke 24:28). Did He sin? Of course not. Did He bear false witness against them? Of course not. Was there any evil in His actions? Of course not. Have you ever “made as if” you would or would not do something in order to provoke a greater response on the part of those with you? Of course you have. Did you sin? Of course not. Did Jesus act a “half-truth”? You chose the wording, but He obviously acted contrary to His actual intentions. Was it a whole lie? Of course not.

Jesus taught His disciples to deceive others regarding their habits of prayer and fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). Is this sin? Should we wear a sign admitting we are fasting in order to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth? This “pretense” does not harm others and it brings greater glory to God. How will you condemn it?

What About . . . “Half-Truths”? - 2

God's commandment is this: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Covering sin is doing a favor for your neighbor. What kind of person is it that would condemn such action?

Did God lie to Abraham, when He told him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen 22:1-2)? Did God know He would provide a lamb? Why didn't He tell him the whole truth? What about Isaiah's warning that Hezekiah would surely die (Isaiah 38:1)? What about Joseph and his brethren (Gen 42:7)?

What About . . . God Revealing It?

Question: If God reveals a covered sin, does that not prove He wanted it revealed from the beginning rather than concealed.

Answer: We do not judge God's will by circumstances. The events of life do not reveal His will for our lives nor even His relationship with us (Ec 7:14; 9:1).

Job's three friends looked at his life and made the false judgment God was punishing secret sins in his life. God rebuked them for their evil application (Job 42:7), and they had to beg Job to pray to God for mercy (Job 42:8).

It is a popular human tendency, but a foolish one, that causes men to presume on the will of God by concluding things from circumstances. Spiritual men should try to emulate Elihu from the book of Job rather than the three miserable comforters - Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

God is of such infinite intelligence He may accomplish two, twenty, ninety, or more purposes with a single event. It is foolish and vain to presume that we know the will of God by circumstances. Our duty is to follow Scripture, for the revealed things were given to us to do them (Deut 29:29).

Since forsaken sin should be covered according to Scripture, we may certainly know we have been righteous in doing so. If God reveals a past sin, we should consider our lives in light of other claims of Scripture. There may be other problems He is addressing, or it may be a trial of our faith.

What About . . . Getting Caught?

Question: Can a person truly be repentant when he did not admit his sin until he was caught?

Answer: What about David? He did not admit his adultery and murder and seek forgiveness until Nathan the prophet confronted him (II Sam 12:5-7,13). Was he simply sorry he had been caught? God forbid. Was his repentance sincere? Definitely. Did God forgive him? Immediately.

It is a fact of human experience and God's ordinary means that men repent when they are confronted about their sins. Until they are "caught" or consequences catch up with them, they will flatter themselves in their sin (Psalm 36:2). What purpose would the ministry have, if men generally repented by some supernatural impulses of the Spirit?

Getting "caught" is not a coincidence – it is part of the Providence of God. Therefore, it is part of God's merciful dealing with His children. Rather than viewing it as a sign of obstinance in a sinner, a wise man will consider it as a sign of God's chastening love and pity.

No man stops sinning until he is caught. He is either caught by circumstances, which is the Providence of God; or he is caught by conviction, which is the Mercy of God.

Thankfully, God is more merciful than the Pharisees, who have never learned about forgiveness and mercy.

What About . . . License to Sin?

Question: If repentance can lead to even large, private sins being covered, will this not lead to lasciviousness?

Answer: Repentance is not easy. It is the gift of God. It cannot be faked for long. Lasciviousness is unbridled lust and is totally contrary to repentance. True repentance has a nature that clears the offender only by diligent and consistent effort (II Cor 7:10-11).

Since repentance involves forsaking sin and bringing forth good works, how can any charge that repentance leads to lasciviousness? Such thinking is plainly contrary to Scripture and perverted. Sin, where repentance has not been obtained, can and should be revealed in the proper time and Scriptural manner.

Thank God for His faithfulness, for He has promised to forgive those who confess to Him (I John 1:9). Does the free and complete forgiveness we have in Jesus Christ lead godly men to lascivious lives?

Pharisees love to lay burdens on men that God never intended, but it is their unmerciful spirit that we are to avoid. Holding sin and guilt over a repenting sinner is something Jesus Christ never did and is completely contrary to the gospel. They think harshness purges iniquity, but Scripture declares that by mercy and truth iniquity is purged (Prov 16:6).

If we accept this objection, we might as well argue that election and free justification cannot be true, because they might lead to fatalism.

God gave the pattern and instructions for forgiveness and covering, and He will reveal and/or judge those who attempt to abuse it.

What About . . . Personal Confessions?

Question: Doesn't every offender need to make a confession for his sin to each person affected by it?

Answer: Sin is against God, therefore sin is to be confessed to Him. He has the right to dictate laws governing our conduct, and it is to Him that we owe our confession.

Consider Joseph in Genesis 39:9. He did not consider Potiphar as the victim of his potential sin, but rather God Himself. This is very important. Taking Potiphar's wife would indeed affect Potiphar and his marriage. But Joseph understood the nature of sin – it was against the God Who had said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Consider Achan in Joshua 7:20. He confessed his sin as being against God. Even though thirty Israelites had died in their vain attempt against Ai, his sin was against God.

Consider David in II Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 51:4. He specifically teaches us that his sin was against God and only against God. We often emphasize these words. While Uriah certainly suffered, and Bathsheba was violated, his offence was against the God Who had declared, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Sin does hurt men and violate commitments between men. And to the reasonable extent possible, these parties should be satisfied by restitution or apology. Zacchaeus, under the conviction of sin in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, promised complete restitution and public service for his past sins. But confession of sin is not properly addressed to those offended, and neither can they properly grant forgiveness.

What About . . . Public Confession?

Question: What about the practice among some churches of confessing large, private sins to the church?

Answer: Sin is the transgression of the law of God (I John 3:4), and as such it is against God (Genesis 39:9).

There is no Scriptural basis for this practice. It undermines true faith in Christ's forgiveness and gives the church power and position that Christ does not give it. Would we not benefit by considering the corruption of confession and forgiveness that Rome has created with her confessional?

In fact, such a practice makes private sins public, thus raising the necessity of exclusion; for then large sins are being named among a congregation and becoming of common report.

Where is personal mercy when such a practice is required or allowed? Scripture declares that a merciful man doeth good to his own soul and, of course, to others (Proverbs 11:17; James 2:13).

A conscience feeling guilt until he has told the church is an unlearned conscience. The blood of Jesus Christ has plenty of forgiveness in it to cover any sin and leave the child of God with boldness before the holy throne of God. There is no need to obtain forgiveness from the church.

An excluded church member should be restored after they have acknowledged their sin against God and cleared himself from guilt by diligent faithfulness (II Samuel 12:13; II Cor 7:10-11). In most all cases, there does not need to be any extended covering of details.

What About . . . James 5:16?

Question: Does not James 5:16 teach us to confess our sins to each other and thus make them public?

Answer: The “faults” must primarily be small matters of personal offence between brethren. While this would clearly fit with Scripture (Matthew 5:23-25; 18:15-17,21-22; I Cor 6:1-8), the confession of sins against God to unrelated parties would not fit as clearly (I John 1:9; Psalm 51:4).

Such a confession of small “faults” as described in Matthew 5:23-25 would definitely assist our prayer lives, which is the context in James. Peter also references the hindrance that unresolved private offences can create in I Peter 3:7.

Though it would certainly be profitable for burdened sinners to seek out a spiritual brother or sister in the church for confession and prayer for sins, this does not seem to be the intent of the passage.

Observe that this is private confession – one to another. This is one-on-one action; this is not public or corporate action. This is not confession to the church at large.

And neither can this verse be perverted to justify Rome’s profane auricular confession, which is one of her pagan seven sacraments.

What About . . . Sexual Sins?

Question: Is not adultery and other sexual sins exceptionally heinous and needing different treatment?

Answer: The Bible does not make such a distinction. While it identifies some aspects of sexual sins that set them apart from other sins (Prov 6:30-35; I Cor 6:18), there is no directive for a different set of rules to be used in judgment.

Since sexual sins – adultery and fornication – are some of the more common sins among men both by experience and Scripture, they and their judgment should be well understood. Since they are sins greatly affecting human emotions, they should carefully be guarded from personal opinion and influence.

Certain passages should be properly interpreted and applied. For example, consider Proverbs 6:30-35. Some take this passage to be teaching that a husband should never forgive the man, who commits adultery with his wife. This is a false interpretation and application. Solomon is here warning his son of the danger of women by contrasting stealing as a result of hunger with adultery. Men view these sins differently, and Solomon wanted his son to realize the serious nature of adultery.

These verses are not instructional in teaching proper behavior and wisdom for children of God, but rather descriptive of the natural response of men in the world. Grace and the New Testament teach us that we should not respond naturally (I Cor 2:14-15; Gal 5:17), but rather spiritually to temptations such as this. A child of God will strive to show mercy and forgiveness even where his natural man is contemplating hatred and vengeance.

The sweet psalmist of Israel, David, was guilty of an aggravated case of adultery. God forgave him, and the inspired record has given hope and comfort to many that have read it (Rom 15:4).

What About . . . Murder?

Question: Though this covering of private sin sounds good, its obvious fallacy will appear when murder is considered. Surely you would not endorse covering murder.

Answer: We assume that the sin is private and repentance is in place.

Abortion by a foolish, impulsive, and scared teenage girl is a very real possibility in our society.

This matter should be buried. The girl should be left in the hands of God, Who brings about chastening for such sins in His Own merciful Providence.

It should not be revealed. There is no Scriptural directive to reveal this sin.

Revealing it would be talebearing.

What if a father discovered such a terrible crime and his daughter's repentance, while reading her diary? Should he bring it to the church? Should he tell the neighbors? Should he tell the deacons? No! No! No! Informing his wife and confronting his daughter would both be matters of liberty left to his own conscience.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin – even murder. Both David and Paul were thankful that God could forgive murder.

There is every reason to conceal this sin and no reason to reveal it.

What About . . . Difficulty?

Question: Are not some sins going to be very difficult to forgive and cover? Wouldn't it be preferable to reveal them?

Answer: Should we try to eliminate the Providence of God in other areas of our lives in order to avoid difficulty? God has never allowed any temptation that is not common to man and that cannot be escaped (I Cor 10:13). His grace is sufficient for every need.

Offences against us will require varying degrees of charity to overlook and/or forgive. But this is not a reason to hate.

If we faint in dealing with a difficult situation, the problem rests with our strength rather than the principles of dealing with sin (Prov 24:10). The righteousness of covering sin and forgiving others is not affected. God has simply brought us a greater test.

What About . . . Liberty?

Question: Is this covering of private sin a matter of liberty of conscience that allows a person to either reveal or conceal?

Answer: Covering sin is not a matter of liberty. It is the duty of Christians to pass over, forgive, and endure the offences of others by following the example of their Lord. Not only is it a duty, it should be the reflex action of every Spirit-taught child of God. When knowing of a person, who has been recovered from a fault and converted to the truth, they should have an automatic and strong desire to cover and bury that person's sins.

What About . . . Public Rebukes?

Question: Since I Timothy 5:20 teaches bishops to publicly rebuke sinners before the congregation for the godly fear it would create among others, how does this duty fit in with the rest of this subject? According to all that has gone before, a public rebuke of a private sin would require the exclusion of the offender.

Solution: First, we may consider exclusion itself. Such an event properly done creates an opportunity for ministers to bring the gospel hammer down against iniquity. Clearly, when I Corinthians 5 was read at Corinth, many feared; for we read of their godly repentance (II Cor 7:6-16). The solemnity of a godly exclusion with the proper declaration and prayer will cause men to mourn about sin and fear their own wickedness and the possibility of such happening to them.

Second, we may consider the anonymous rebuke before the congregation of church members with private sins (Rom 14:1-10; I Cor 1:10-15; 15:12-19; Gal 1:7; 5:10-12; 6:12-13; Rev 2:12-16). Done wisely with great solemnity and anger against the sin, there will be a definite residual affect on those who are not yet guilty.

Third, with certain subjective sins there is also an opportunity for a pastor to publicly rebuke an offender before it reaches the proportions requiring exclusion.

What About . . . Hearsay?

Question: Is it right for members to report other member's private sins to the pastor? And is it right for him to prosecute from such information?

Solution: Hearsay is permitted and usable to God's ordained overseer, the pastor.

A wise father would not punish a child based on the contrary testimony of another child, but he would still want to know the information the child could give him.

Paul received reports about churches and individuals (II Thess 3:11; I Cor 1:11; 11:18).

The pastor is responsible to inquire and judge (Deut 13:12-18; 17:2-7; 19:16-21; Prov 25:2).

The stipulation of witnesses for an accusation against an elder implies that such is not needed for members (I Timothy 5:19).

Hearsay could occur when a single person i.e. a spouse or friend (1) seeks guidance as to what they should do or (2) has been rebuffed in any attempts to rebuke and convert the offender.

What About . . . Levels of Knowledge?

Question: How should members vote who do not have full knowledge of the circumstances of a case of discipline?

Solution: The level of knowledge of the circumstances in a case of discipline will vary greatly among the membership. The pastor and related parties will know very much, and children and unrelated parties will know far less. This is neither unusual in church matters nor difficult to resolve.

Consider a family. The father has far greater knowledge and wisdom in directing the family's affairs than anyone else. He sees circumstances or contingencies unseen by the rest of the family. Infants have neither knowledge nor wisdom at all, and even grown children will often not understand their father's choices; yet they obey his judgment by Scriptural ordinance and practical necessity (Eph 6:1-3). Only if they had superior knowledge of a significant matter would they even question his decision. And this analogy leads us to Christ's ministers, for they must have such ability to lead and rule families as a prerequisite to their office (I Tim 3:5).

In the church of Christ, the bishop or pastor is chosen to lead and rule in such matters. When prosecuting a discipline case, he should by the nature of his job know more details than most or all the other members. It is their duty to trust him and obey his direction from the Scriptures, unless they possess weighty and applicable information he does not; then they should discreetly offer their knowledge to him, rather than oppose him or confuse the church.

When receiving a new member, a pastor will know more of the person's conversion and character than most of the membership. The same is also true for exclusion and restoration of members for discipline. It is the church's duty to trust their pastor in such cases and follow his faith, as taught in Holy Scripture (Hebrews 13:7,17).

Such submission in ignorance is a fundamental principle of authority that is observed in all spheres of authority and at all levels. Privates in the army obey their captains with only partial knowledge, and generals over the army obey their president with only partial knowledge.

What About . . . Turning Over to Satan?

Question: What does Paul mean by turning a sinner over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh for the salvation of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor 5:5)?

Solution: The formal act of exclusion, the agreement of the church that it will no longer consider a particular brother or sister as a member of the body, puts them back into the world, where Satan has easier access to their body and soul for causing them grief and trouble (I Cor 5:5,13).

This is not necessarily a miraculous cursing of a person involving immediate and visible possession by devils, but rather a lifting of the merciful and protective hedge that keeps all saints from the power of the devil, as Job long ago (Job 1:9-12). The goal is the destruction of the fleshly lusts of a sinner that his spirit may be in better condition at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Exposition of I Corinthians 5:1-13

5:1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. Word had come to Paul from numerous sources that the church at Corinth had a fornicator, indicating that most all were aware of the scandalous situation. And the sin was a heinous variation of a definite sin against God (Gen 35:22; 49:4; Lev 18:8; 20:11; Deut 22:30; 27:20).

This was no longer a private sin known only by a few that could be dealt with privately by spiritual brethren (Gal 6:1-2; James 5:19-20). "Common report" by the definition of its terms indicates that the sin was generally known by most outside the church. His instruction to the Ephesians to not let such things be named among them even once made it necessary to deal with this heinous offence (Eph 5:3).

Though the Gentiles were notorious for their lack of sexual continence, they were generally not guilty of the particularly vile incestuous relationship existing at Corinth, which was surprising given the lascivious and licentious reputation of the Corinthians.

5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. Rather than grieving in anger about this pollution of the church body, the Corinthians had chosen to be puffed up in their spiritual gifts (1:7), false notion of love, or lax discipline. They should have been highly incensed that one who had named the name of Christ would engage in such a despicable crime; and they should have already sought for his removal, even if by Divine justice.

5:3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, Paul issues his judgment quickly and authoritatively, as if he had been present in Corinth. There was no need for a fact finding effort or laboring with the sinning brother. He was guilty of a public and scandalous offence, and therefore Paul could judge the matter easily. There is no question concerning repentance, for this public offence must be judged severely.

5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, All actions private and public should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Col 3:17), but Paul here mentions this glorious name twice to establish the authority by which church judgment should be prosecuted. Contrary to any ministerial abuse of power, Paul directs the whole

congregation, when gathered in an official assembly, to carry out this discipline, as if he were present.

5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. *By congregational action in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they were to put from their body, the body of Christ (12:27), this sinning brother, for Satan to torment him for the desired end of saving his spirit. This action is not a miraculous sending of devils into a person, but rather the act of removing a sinner from the protective hedge and mercy provided by membership in a church of Christ.*

5:6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? *Paul corrects their ungodly conduct toward this situation again by further criticizing their haughty spirit. Self-righteous saints can excuse all sort of sins by virtue of apparent blessings or knowledge in other areas. To show them the highly dangerous nature of allowing such a situation to continue unpunished, he reminds them of the permeating affect of sin in the body (Gal 5:9; II Tim 2:17).*

5:7 ¶ Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: *Applying the type of the Passover lamb to Jesus Christ, Paul uses the nature of the unleavened Passover bread to make his argument against public sin in the Corinthian church. Since the Israelites were required to use unleavened bread at the Passover supper, Paul argues similarly to Christ in Mark 8:15 that sin is leaven and should be kept out of the Christian antitypical feast as well. As the bread was made without leaven, the communion of a church should be observed without known sin.*

5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. *While it is a principle of sincere Christian churches to use only unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper, the greater concern should be to keep the supper free of the leaven of malice and wickedness. Paul has pursued the Passover analogy of sin to leaven even further here, and concludes that unleavened bread requires sincere and honest communicants. Therefore, he implies a conclusion he will state clearly in a few verses: the fornicator should be put out of the church and kept from the Lord's table.*

5:9 ¶ I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: *Paul had written this congregation earlier and warned them about socializing unnecessarily and dangerously with fornicators (Eph 5:11-12). Fornication was common among the Gentiles, and especially the Corinthians, as implied by the council at Jerusalem and the*

very frequent mentions of it in his epistles (Acts 15:20,29; 21:25; I Cor 6:18; 7:2; 10:8; II Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; I Thess 4:3-7; Rev 2:14,20-21). So Paul had warned already against unnecessary and compromising relationships with fornicators outside the Corinthian membership.

Paul's tradition allowed social concourse or company or eating with unbelievers (I Cor 10:27), but public fornicators pressed this Christian liberty beyond the lawful to that which was not expedient (I Cor 6:12; 10:23). It is the yoking or fellowship or communion or agreement with such sinners that Paul condemned (II Cor 6:14-17), for such company is both contradictory (Amos 3:3) and dangerous (I Cor 15:33).

5:10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. *If Paul's previous warning were taken too severely, they would have to leave the world, for Gentile sinners were everywhere. To avoid all company with the sinners of this world in an absolute way would require leaving the world altogether, which was not his intent then nor our interpretation now.*

5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. *By this epistle and at this time and to address this and similar situations, Paul draws a stricter rule against fellowship with brethren who engage in these sins. It is a true observation that the saints of God are to show greater discrimination against sinning brethren than sinners of this world.*

Keeping company in this context is more than the Lord's table, for he introduced the expression into this context by applying it to the fornicators of this world (5:9), and the church never communed with unbelieving fornicators. The eating here is just what you might think it is – eating! Such acts of social fellowship with brethren who are guilty of high treason against the Savior destroy the integrity and holiness of the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

The other uses of this expression by the Spirit describe social fellowship rather than communion (Acts 10:28; II Thess 3:14). We may further reason that Paul has already cut the fornicator off from the Lord's table with his Passover illustration of the leaven of malice and wickedness (5:7-8). If we were to limit keeping company and eating to the Lord's table, then what is the action that creates shame comparable to the treatment of an enemy (II Thess 3:14-15)?

It is wise to consider the demonstrative word such in contexts like this one. For in this text we have the general rule laid down for all other public sins comparable to the fornication specific to this case. By comparing several other lists with this identifier such in them, we may tally a list of over forty comparable sins to guide our judgment (Rom 1:28-32; I Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3-7).

Let the Spirit of holiness teach our minds that fornication, covetousness, idolatry, railing, drunkenness, and extortion are all comparable and similar to God. Further consideration of the other lists will give more correction that our deceitful ways of ranking sins does not match with the holiness of Him Who is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Hab 1:13).

5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? *Paul had authority to judge any sinning in the church of God (John 20:23), but he admits no jurisdiction or authority over similar sinners in the world. The word also simply identifies the two groups of sinners under consideration, those within and also those without. The churches of Christ, with apostolic authority granting them the privilege and duty of corporate judgment, are to judge such sinners within the body.*

5:13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. *Sinners outside the body of the Lord Jesus Christ are judged by God; which does not preclude Him from judging those within the body, when the church does not put them out speedily (11:29-32; Acts 5:1-11).*

Our apostle's summary instruction is to put the fornicator out of the church, where the Lord might judge him following congregational action. As the LORD asked Moses and the righteous to stand back that He might judge Israel (Num 16:21,24,26,45), so the churches of Christ are to separate from sinners, for God to judge them outside the church.

Since Satan is the god of this world (II Cor 4:4) and moving only by God's express permission (Job 1:12; 2:6), we find this summary judgment to include delivering such sinners unto Satan as described above (5:5). It is in the world of hopeless Satanic delusion that God's true children may be granted repentance to the acknowledging of the truth and deliverance from their powerful captor (II Tim 2:25-26). And then we may read the blessed recovery of such sinners in Paul's next epistle (II Cor 2:6-8).

Exposition of II Corinthians 2:6-8

2:6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. *It is here where our apostle puts a limit and end to the excommunication and exclusion and shunning directed in his earlier epistle against the fornicator (I Cor 5:1-13). Let us observe that Paul is establishing a general rule here by the use of the demonstrative word such. From this passage we obtain our apostolic tradition for godly restoration without the human learning or instruction of any man or church council.*

We may learn from this short text that comparable punishment is due all similar sinners who are also called brothers. Our demonstrative word such requires that all sins of the New Testament associated with fornication are to be treated as the Corinthians fornicator was treated in I Corinthians 5:1-13 and here.

Let us further observe that exclusion must be a punishment for it to be apostolic indeed. Censures without a time of suffering and shame, and exclusions from the Lord's supper while allowing other social fellowship, do not meet this rule of Scripture. Neither do they meet the apostolic standard confirmed and established elsewhere (Rom 16:17-18; II Thess 3:6,14-15).

And there is no room in this text, or any other text, for carnal inventions in the church of Jesus Christ such as ostracizing, banishment, torture, or death as the Harlot Church of Rome has worked to perfection for about fifteen hundred years. The punishment is limited to the immediate context here and the putting forth from the Lord's table in the earlier epistle.

Further let it be understood by all that this punishment cannot be executed by mere ministerial decision, as it must be an action of the whole church. Let those who cavil about ministerial authority in a single bishop look to Scriptures such as this for their protection, rather than to Presbyterianism and other manmade systems that choke and confuse the flock rather than protect it.

2:7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. *In contrast to the nature of exclusion – the denial of forgiveness and comfort – restoration is to be the expression and confirming of these things with abundant love. We have here both a further description of the proper punishment and the ingredients for a proper restoration. While forgiveness and comfort have been denied to secure the backslider's shame and repentance unto salvation, they are now given again specifically and specially.*

Every godly pastor must guard carefully against drowning a repentant sinner with overmuch sorrow. In these words we have stated both the minimum and maximum length of time for exclusion. It must be long enough to satisfy Paul's clear definition of godly sorrow (II Cor 7:10-11), and it must be short enough to save one in godly sorrow from despair. Such wisdom is only somewhat more than that expected of all fathers (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21); surely the man of God can find this wise balance.

2:8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. *The restoration of a repenting sinner is a sweet and blessed event to any taught by grace and filled with the Holy Ghost. If the angels in heaven rejoice over such circumstances (Luke 15:7,10), then should not the church of God consider this one of their most sublime moments on earth? So let this act and work of restoration be done with zeal and great affection; as the prodigal's father, let us kill the fatted calf, bring forth a robe, put shoes on his feet, and put a ring on his finger (Luke 15:22-24,32).*

If a reader finds himself offended by such pleasure over a repenting rebel, then let him heed the warning of the Saviour against the older brother and his Pharisee cousins (Luke 5:29-32; 15:1-3; 18:9-14).