

THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD  
A BROTHER WHO PERSISTS IN SIN  
EVEN AFTER ADMONISHMENT

by

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## ABSTRACT

Title: THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD A BROTHER WHO  
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One difficult problem which every believer is already facing or will probably face in the future is that of determining his personal responsibility toward another brother or sister in Christ who continues to live in disobedience to and rebellion against clear commands of the Word of God. Many unbiblical solutions, which have included a wide range of actions, have been used in an effort to solve this problem.

Four passages of Scripture, which demonstrate the Biblical solution to this problem, are discussed in this paper. They are: II Thessalonians 3:6,11,12,14,15; I Corinthians 5:9-11,13; Romans 16:17-19 and Titus 3:10-11. Each of these four passages sets forth at least three offenses and an accompanying command, or commands, pertaining to the offenses.

The cumulative content of these passages clearly teaches that a believer's responsibility toward an erring brother, who continues to live a disobedient and disorderly life, are: first, to know what the offenses listed in Scripture are which Paul designates as grounds for shunning the disorderly brother; second, to have observed, even after restoration efforts have been attempted, one or more of these offenses continuing to exist in the believer's life; and third, to continually, intentionally keep away from any contact with him as long as he refuses to confess his sin and straighten out his life.

This Biblical teaching on separation has many practical applications for living the Christian life today. At least six to these applications, from this teaching, could be directly applied to the practical outworking of obedience to God in everyday Christian living.

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## INTRODUCTION

Believers today, as in past centuries, face many difficult situations as they seek to live the Christian life. One of the difficult situations each one will likely encounter is his personal responsibility when another brother or sister in Christ continues to live in disobedience to and rebellion against clear commands of the Word of God. The question then becomes: What is a believer's Scriptural responsibility toward this erring brother? Many voices have suggested solutions detailing what this specific responsibility is. The solutions have included an enormous range of possibilities all the way from ignoring the problem hoping it will work itself out; to simply showing love to this brother; to disciplining him; to shunning him; to driving him away; or to mixing various combinations of the options previously mentioned.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the Scripture teaches that a believer's responsibilities toward an erring brother, who continues to live a disobedient and disorderly life, are: first, to know what the offenses listed in Scripture are which Paul designates as grounds for shunning a disorderly brother; second, to have observed, even after restoration efforts have been attempted, one or more of these offenses continuing to exist in the believer's life;

and third, to continually, intentionally keep away from any contact with him as long as he refuses to confess his sin and straighten out his life. This paper is not a treatment of church discipline, but of individual responsibility. However, it must be understood that an individual believer's duty, in the area of personal separation, will of necessity be linked closely with the responsibility of his local church in dealing with an offending brother. It will be assumed in this paper that every possible effort has already been extended toward the erring brother to gain him back and restore him to fellowship, as Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1-5 teach.

The four basic passages which address this issue will be analyzed. These passages are: II Thessalonians 3:6, 11,12,14,15; I Corinthians 5:9-11,13; Romans 16:17-19; and Titus 3:10-11. They will be discussed in this order because it is the probable order in which they were originally written. Though the responsibility commanded toward the erring brother is much the same in three of these passages the background to the book, the context and the specific offenses are different. Therefore, each of the passages will be discussed in a separate chapter. A chapter containing the practical applications for today of the teaching of these passages terminates this study and constitutes the conclusion.

## CHAPTER I

### II THESSALONIANS 3:6,11,12,14-15

#### The Background And Context

The second epistle to the Thessalonians was written about 51 A.D. by Paul from Corinth, shortly after I Thessalonians was written. Paul's purpose in writing the second epistle was to directly address some problems that had arisen there and also to praise the believers for the fact that their faith was growing and their love for one another was abounding. Certain problems had developed in Thessalonica since the first epistle had been written. The basic problem underlying the others was that some of the believers had come to believe that the "Day of the Lord" was already at hand.

There were two main reasons for this belief. The first was that a false letter had apparently been sent to Thessalonica (2 Th. 2:2). Paul's name had been signed to it and it stated that the Day of the Lord was at hand. The second reason for this belief was that the believers there were already suffering persecution. Some of the ones who believed that the Day of the Lord was at hand were leaving their employment positions, depleting their financial reserves, and thus placing a burden on their church to support them. These

people were also disturbing the unity of the church.

Paul in addressing this situation, in chapter one, gave the Thessalonians comfort in their persecution by assuring them that Christ would return. He clarified some details about the time of Christ's return in chapter two, verses 1-12. In the remaining section of the book, 2:13 through 3:15, he stated some specific exhortations and instructions in the light of Christ's return. The verses of the passage under consideration in this chapter come under Paul's specific command for the Thessalonian believers to work while they waited for the Lord's return.

### The Offenses

The apostle Paul in these verses named four offenses which believers at Thessalonica were committing. Verses six and eleven describe certain believers as ἀτάκτως. A good definition of this word is "those who live in idleness."<sup>1</sup> It occurs only four times in the New Testament and all four are in I or II Thessalonians. The word "is a military term used of soldiers who march out of order or quit the ranks."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1885), p. 83.

These believers, classified as ἀτάκτως, who believed so strongly that the Day of the Lord was near actually allowed this belief to obscure their sense of obligation to meet the physical needs of their families. Outside of Christianity, where the verb form is frequently used, the emphasis of meaning lay on "an irresponsible attitude to the obligation to work."<sup>1</sup>

More was involved in this offense than just living in idleness and an irresponsible attitude to their obligation to work. The context of ἀτάκτως in verse eleven clearly indicates that the idea of unruly activity is involved in the meaning.<sup>2</sup> Paul says they were not working but acting as busybodies. The present tense of the participle, περιπατοῦντες, suggests a deliberate course of action on the part of these people and not merely an occasional lapse.

This very problem existed earlier in the church in Thessalonica, to a lesser degree, for Paul spoke of it in I Thessalonians 5:14. It evidently had become a more serious problem since the writing of the earlier epistle. This fact is obvious because of Paul's lengthy treatment of the problem

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<sup>1</sup>G. Delling, "ἀτάκτος," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VIII. trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Jay Pankratz, "The Doctrine of Church Discipline in II Thessalonians 3," Master of Divinity Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, May, 1974, p. 24.

in this section. This disorderly type of lifestyle was in direct contrast to the example of industry and independence set by Paul during this time in Thessalonica.<sup>1</sup> In verses seven through ten, he referred to his testimony and lifestyle during his time spent in Thessalonica.

The second offense, set forth in verses six and fourteen, which these believers were committing was that of not completely following the teaching which Paul and those with him had given. The participle, περιπατοῦντες, also governs the phrase not according to the traditions which you received from us. Some believers were not walking, or conducting their lives, in accordance with the specific teaching Paul had given for correct doctrine and daily practice. Παράδοσιν can be accurately translated tradition which is composed of teachings or commandments handed down from previous generations. It carries with it in the New Testament the idea of authority external to the teacher himself.<sup>2</sup> Therefore Paul's teachings in his epistles and his oral teaching while with them earlier, carried more than his own authority. It carried divine authority. To disobey

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<sup>1</sup>John Eadie, A Commentary of the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1877; reprint, Minneapolis, Minnesota: James and Klock Christian Publishing Co., 1977), p. 310.

<sup>2</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, Notes On The Epistles of St. Paul (I and II Thessalonians, I Corinthians 1-7, Romans 1-7, Ephesians 1:1-14), (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1978), p. 121.

the teaching of Paul was an offense to God.

The third offense according to this passage is presented in verse eleven. Περιεργαζομένων describes one who is using his time, doing unnecessary, useless things. Though these people were no longer working at their jobs, they were by no means inactive. This kind of person is a busybody, who does little for anyone except to cause them problems. The substance of this verse suggests that a certain condition in these believers was already existing at the time Paul wrote II Thessalonians. The two present participles imply that these people were already in the process of doing unnecessary, useless things which they had no business doing.

The fourth offense is a result of the fact that these believers were guilty of the first three offenses. Verse twelve states that they were commanded to work and eat their own bread. This implies they were not working, but were acting as busybodies. They were not eating their own food and thus they were imposing themselves on other brothers for their very existence. Such an imposition very quickly caused disunity among the believers and this carried right over into the church.

#### The Commands

Intermingled with the offenses listed in these verses is Paul's clear instruction to the majority of believers in the church, ὑμῖν, who were not guilty of committing these



offenses. Paul and those with him in Corinth commanded specific, immediate action be taken. The verb παραγγέλλομεν is an authoritative word stressing that the desired action is a "binding order which they were expected to obey"<sup>1</sup> and not merely the suggestion of an available option. In addition to the thrust of this binding order is the fact that it is a solemn charge given in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Christ's name, under His authority.<sup>2</sup>

The immediate, specific action to be taken is laid down clearly in verse six and further explained in verse fourteen. Earlier in I Thessalonians 5:14, Paul told the believers to admonish those who became disorderly. In verse six the treatment commanded for these disorderly brothers is much sterner because evidently the admonition had failed and the problem was becoming more serious. Paul used the present infinitive στέλλεσθαι to convey the desired action. Since this word occurs only twice in the New Testament, the non-biblical usage is significant. The verb root of this infinitive, στέλλω, originally meant to set, place and then bring together, as in shortening the sails of a ship.<sup>3</sup> Over a period of time the word came to denote restraint. In the

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<sup>1</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, The Thessalonian Epistles, A Call to Readiness, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 338.

<sup>2</sup>Eadie, A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, p. 309.

<sup>3</sup>Pankratz, "The Doctrine of Church Discipline In II Thessalonians 3," p. 50.

middle voice the meaning developed into drawing or shrinking back from something.

The Biblical usage adds only slightly to the understanding of the meaning. The idea of a withdrawal or shrinking back from something or someone seems to convey the most accurate meaning in this context. When applied to verse six, the meaning would suggest that the believers, who Paul was admonishing to withdraw from the disorderly ones, were doing so because "they feared the disorderly and thus would probably restrict their relationship in order to avoid their dangerous influence."<sup>1</sup> The present tense adds the concept that moving away from these offending brothers is to be a continual practice not an action which is done only one time. Since verse fourteen is much more stern in tone than verse six, it should be understood, from verse six, that Paul is saying that believers should be taking steps away from those who are living disorderly lives.

Verse fourteen further explains what Paul said in verse six, repeats the responsibility in a more definite way, and states the purpose for such action. He uses the word σημειοῦσθε, which means to take special notice of or put some type of a mark on something so as to distinguish it. The mood of the verb could be either indicative or imperative.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

In this context, the imperative should be understood. The verb form is middle voice, but it is from the deponent root σημειόμαι which makes the imperative active voice in its function.

The individuals in Thessalonica were to take special note of those causing the offenses. In their minds they were to mark and to observe these people over a period of time so as to be able to distinguish them as offenders. The standard of this measurement was whether or not they were subject to, ὑπακούει, the words of Paul's epistles. Therefore, the process of determining if a person was an offender was to be accomplished by first-hand observation not by second-hand information. Once these people were specifically noted, the believers conducting their lives according to Paul's teachings were not to associate with them, μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι αὐτοῖς. This same verb form occurs in I Corinthians 5:9 and 11. The root of the infinitive used in this verse, συναναμίγνυμι, with the negative particle μὴ means to have no dealings with or do not associate with.

The purpose of this previously commanded action, ἵνα ἐντραπή, is to make the offenders ashamed of their sin so that they might repent and reform their lives and then be restored to fellowship by the other believers. The root form of this word, ἐντραπέω, means to make ashamed. With the passive voice, the idea conveyed is to be turned in upon oneself. Paul's threefold procedure thus far outlined in the

Thessalonian Epistles was: first, to admonish the offender (I Th. 5:14), second, to be gradually withdrawing from him (II Th. 3:6); and third, to be marking him and not associating with him (II Th. 3:14) in order that the person might be turned upon himself and feel ashamed of his actions. This shame, produced by the withdrawal of his brethren from fellowship with him, was meant to induce thought, contrition and reform.<sup>1</sup> The action of withdrawal and disassociation was specifically designed to make the offender keenly aware that other believers disapproved of his sinful behavior.

In verse fifteen after the above three steps have been taken, Paul gives his final instruction on the matter. The root form of the imperative used in this context, *ἡγέομαι*, means to think, consider or regard something or someone.<sup>2</sup> The phrase, regard him not as an enemy, reflects the proper mental attitude which a believer is to manifest toward an offender. It would be relatively easy to develop a hostile attitude toward one who remains stubbornly rebellious. The attitude toward the offender was not to be based on an "inner feeling or sentiment, but on the due consideration of external grounds."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Eadie, A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 344.

<sup>3</sup>Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 276.

Thus Paul commands the faithful believers to still consider or regard the offender as a brother and not as an enemy, for he had not forsaken the faith.

Paul ends verse fifteen and closes this section of the epistle by setting forth a contrasting statement. He introduces this statement with the conjunction ἀλλά. It is used "to set a strong contrast between the antagonistic attitude which is prohibited and the brotherly action which is to be shown."<sup>1</sup> The imperative *νοθετεῖτε* means to admonish, instruct or warn.<sup>2</sup> It denotes the idea of reminding someone about correct doctrine and entreating him about his responsibility in light of it. By using the present tense and the active voice, Paul is encouraging the believer never to give up on his efforts in actively seeking to restore the offender. The task is not optional, nor is it based upon the offender's response.<sup>3</sup> The use of this verb *νοθετεῖτε* suggests that Paul thought that there would be some opportunities to lovingly confront the erring brother even during the time of his disassociation.

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<sup>1</sup>Pankratz, "The Doctrine of Church Discipline in II Thessalonians 3," p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 546.

<sup>3</sup>David R. Nicholas, "The Biblical Doctrine of Separation (First and Second Degrees?)," (Postgraduate Seminar paper for New Testament Theology, Grace Theological Seminary, May, 1977), p. 32.

## CHAPTER II

### I CORINTHIANS 5:9-11,13

#### The Background And Context

I Corinthians was written by Paul, to the church in Corinth, while he was residing in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. The church in Corinth had been established by Paul while he was on his second missionary journey and in Greece. This church was composed mostly of Gentile converts with some Jews in it. The city in which this church existed in the first century was a natural center of commerce and transportation.

The city was a center of idolatry and immorality. Corinth had a reputation for wickedness far beyond the other great cities of her day.<sup>1</sup> It was a city whose residents loved intellectualism and sought to answer, by their reason, the perplexing questions of the day. It is therefore inevitable, considering this wicked environment, that problems would arise in the church at Corinth.

Paul learned of specific problems in the church through different means of communication to him. These communications came to him by personal report, through rumor and

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<sup>1</sup>James L. Boyer, For A World Like Ours - Studies In I Corinthians, (Winnona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1975), p. 17.

in an official letter. The Epistle of I Corinthians was written to address these problems existing in the Corinthian Church. In chapter five, Paul dealt with the problem of immorality which had been reported to him through rumor. He no doubt consulted reliable sources before he addressed the stern rebuke in chapter five to the believers there.

### The Offenses

In verses ten through thirteen, the author very distinctly states that brothers in Christ are the offenders. Paul notes in verse ten the people to whom he is referring are not outsiders from the world, but ones who call themselves brothers, ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος, verse eleven. These people either are believers or they have deceived themselves and others into thinking that they are believers. He asks, in verse twelve, why he should judge those who are outside when God already judges them?

There are six offenses which Paul lists in this passage. A serious problem had arisen in the Corinthian Church. Paul names these offenses during his discussion of the problem. The problem of sexual immorality was the offense upon which he was centering the majority of his attention in the early verses of chapter five. It concerned a well known case of immorality in the Corinthian Church. Evidently Paul had heard about this problem while he was working in the church at Ephesus.

The problem is stated in the early verses of the chapter.

The specific sin involved here is a particularly shameful case of incest (marriage within the circle of close relatives).<sup>1</sup> The man involved was a professing believer and a member of the church. From verse one the words that one should have his father's wife could be understood to mean that the man was having a continuing sexual relationship with his own mother or a stepmother. The context of verses nine through thirteen suggests that this problem was steadily getting worse as the immoral relationship was allowed to continue.

The first offense and the one primarily in view, πορνός is named two times, once each in both verses nine and eleven. A general definition of the word is "a man who indulges in unlawful sexual intercourse."<sup>2</sup> In this context, Paul seems to be using the word as "a general term for sexual immorality."<sup>3</sup> He is implying by the use of this term in verses nine and eleven that any kind of sexual immorality is an offense which should move believers into action to deal with the offender.

The remaining five offenses, which are recorded in verse eleven, are here added to the list because they also presented problems in the Corinthian Church. The first

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1885), p. 532.

<sup>3</sup>Boyer, For A World Like Ours - Studies In I Corinthians, p. 58.



offense listed after πόρνος is πλεονέκτης. The word may be defined as one who is greedy for gain or extremely covetous. The main thought conveyed is that of striving for material possessions and taking advantage of one's neighbour in order to fulfill this craving.<sup>1</sup> The next offense is εἰδωλολάτρης or a person who worships false gods. In Corinth an idolator was a person who was "a participant in any way in the worship of heathen."<sup>2</sup> The social usages of the word and the idol feasts common in the culture of the first century "may have led to a superstitious recognition of the beings supposed to be represented by the idols."<sup>3</sup> Such recognition of supposed spirit beings by Christians in the Corinthian Church quite possibly was the offense Paul was addressing in verse eleven.

The term λοῖδορος is listed as the next offense which is in verse eleven. This type of person was a reviler, one "given to the vice of abusing the character of other people."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard Delling, "πλεονέκτης," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VI, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 271.

<sup>2</sup>Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup>Charles J. Ellicott, St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians: With a Critical and Grammatical Commentary, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887; reprinted, Minneapolis: The James Family Christian Publishers, n.d.), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians, (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1975), p. 229.

The term comes from the root λοιδορέω which simply means to heap on verbal abuse in such a way so as to insult or even blaspheme someone.<sup>1</sup> Μέθυσοϛ is listed as the offense following that of a reviler. This term is translated as one intoxicated with wine, given to the use of much wine or simply a drunkard.<sup>2</sup> The final offense named in verse eleven is ἄρπαξ or one who is a robber, an extortioner.<sup>3</sup> The term comes from the verb ἄρπάζω which means to seize, snatch away or claim for one's self. A person characterized by this type of an attitude stops at nothing to rob others.<sup>4</sup>

Two factors would suggest that more than these six offenses should be considered from this general context, when a believer is considering his responsibility to a sinning brother. First, there is no reason to believe that this list of six offenses is a complete list. Possibly Paul is enlarging the list by adding four more offenses in 6:9-10.<sup>5</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup>H. Hanse, "λοιδοροϛ," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 293.

<sup>2</sup>H. Preisker, "μέθυσοϛ," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 547.

<sup>3</sup>Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 229.

<sup>5</sup>Boyer, For A World Like Ours - Studies In I Corinthians, p. 65.

is true that offenses like the ones listed in I Corinthians 6:9-10 more often characterize the obviously ungodly behavior of unbelievers. However, it is possible, in the exceedingly corrupt environment of Corinth, that a few of the more recent converts were still partially involved in one or more of these habits from their pre-conversion lives. Though they could have been receiving instruction and admonition from church leaders about obedient Christian behavior, the change from long established pagan habit patterns could have been still taking place in their lives. Such offenders as adulterers, the effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind and thieves, if they were believers, should certainly be prime candidates for further instruction about their sin and then be subject to the type of action recommended in this passage.

Also note the words τῷ τοιοῦτῳ in verse eleven. This correlative pronoun is from τοιοῦτος which means such a one. When the article is present with the word as it appears here in the dative case, the term could be translated "with one who is of such a character."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the thrust of the term τοιοῦτῳ is that offenders of a character such as those mentioned above, both in chapters five and six, should be targets for the action recommended in this passage.

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<sup>1</sup>Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 627.

The second factor, which should be noted from Paul's treatment of the problem, is that a general principle is being established. By adding to fornicators the other classes of open sinners, Paul lifts the matter above a reference to only one kind of sinners and indicated that a principle is involved which is applicable to all open and flagrant sinners.<sup>1</sup> Paul has clearly given guidelines in these two passages to aid in determining what constitutes open and flagrant offenses.

#### The Command

In verses nine, eleven and thirteen, Paul gives stern instructions in regard to the brother and others who were making a habit of committing sexual immorality. He also gives instructions to the believers in Corinth about how to deal with the other types of open and flagrant offenses, which had either been directly stated or implied in the teaching of the passage.

In verses nine and eleven, Paul uses the present middle infinitive form of συναναμίγνυμι with the negative particle μή. The words, μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι, could accurately be translated not to associate with or have no dealings with. The present tense indicates that this action is to be continuous in nature. It is to be a course of personal conduct, just as the offender's life of indulging in a flagrant sin

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 226,227.

is a course of conduct. This course is to be continued as long as the offender continues his disobedient behavior. The words  $\mu\eta\ \sigma\upsilon\nu\alpha\nu\alpha\mu\acute{\iota}\gamma\gamma\upsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  should be classified as an infinitive of indirect discourse which is used as an imperative.<sup>1</sup>

The reference here is to dealings with an offender in an individual believer's private, social, continuous relationship. Some believers have assumed that the responsibility to have no dealings with a person of this nature extends only to participation in the Lord's Supper. This responsibility to not associate with such an offender extends beyond observance of the Lord's Supper in a local church setting. It refers to stopping associations with these people even at ordinary meals.

Paul states at the end of verse eleven  $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon\ \sigma\upsilon\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\acute{\iota}\epsilon\iota\nu$ , do not eat with them. Eating with this person indicates a union with him and in a certain sense condones his sinful behavior. This simply means, that once a believer has objectively observed such an offense to be existing in the personal life of a fellow believer who has been taught and also knows his behavior is sinful, there is "to be even a dissolution of the personal relation."<sup>2</sup> The believer's obligation is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>2</sup>Ellicott, St. Paul's First Epistle to The Corinthians: With A Critical and Grammatical Commentary, p. 92.

clear. He is to "hold no intercourse at all with persons of the sort mentioned."<sup>1</sup> The believer is not to entertain such a person as a guest in his own home. He is not to visit this person as a guest in his home nor is he to unite in fellowship with him on some other occasion. In effect, in verses nine and eleven Paul is instructing each Corinthian believer not to have any close, continuous relationship with any believer conducting his life by participating in one or more of the very serious sins named or implied in this context.

Paul's instruction did not stop at the point of disassociating with these wicked persons. He carries it one step further. He closes verse thirteen with a direct command to the Corinthian believer regarding his responsibility to an offender. He uses the aorist active imperative form of ἐξαίρω, which means to drive out, drive away or remove.<sup>2</sup> This command was not a new one to the people of God. It was an adaptation of the command given in Deuteronomy 17:7 for the children of Israel to put away evildoers from among them.<sup>3</sup> The removal of the evildoer in this Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup>John Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures - Corinthians, trans. by Phillip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, Notes On The Epistles of St. Paul (I and II Thessalonians, I Corinthians 1-7, Romans 1-7, Ephesians 1:1-14), (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, n.d.), p. 209.

passage was intended to be much more permanent than Paul's command. In the Old Testament, the evildoer was to be put to death and the hands of the witness against him were to be the first ones involved in the task. The Corinthian offender was to be literally removed from the presence of an individual believer or a group of believers. This action by the believer is to convey to the offender that he takes sin seriously, just as God takes it seriously.

## CHAPTER III

### ROMANS 16:17-19

#### The Background And Context

The epistle to the beloved of God in Rome was written by Paul from Corinth during his third visit to that city (II Cor. 13:1; Acts 20:2,3). The occasion for the epistle of Romans centered upon Paul's future plan to visit Rome on his trip to Spain. He had not traveled to Rome so he did not know personally the majority of the Christians in the church there. He greatly desired to communicate to the Roman Christians the great doctrines of the faith which he had been preaching at other churches he had established. The epistle contains the most complete, systematic exposition of the basic truths of Christianity that appears in the New Testament.

The three particular verses under consideration in this chapter occur in the conclusion of the epistle following the extended doctrinal and practical Christian living sections. The immediate context, in which these three verses appear, also includes Paul's travel plans, his personal greetings to several close friends who were living in Rome, personal greetings from a few of the Christian workers who were with him in Corinth, a short commendation to the Roman Christians for their obedience and a Pauline benediction.



### The Offenses

Four offenses are set forth in these verses. Due to the brief treatment Paul gives these problems, the ones guilty of these offenses probably were not posing a great problem to the believers in Rome at the time Paul wrote the epistle. However, Paul had already witnessed in other churches, such as Thessalonica and Corinth, the damage that offenders, continuing to conduct their lives in open disobedience to apostolic teaching, could cause to the unity of the believers. It is possible Paul had heard of some of these marginal evidences of troublemakers arising in the church at Rome. His desire in listing these offenses was to warn the Roman believers about these people and to instruct them in what their responsibility was when the need arose. Two of these offenses are mentioned in verse seventeen and two in verse eighteen.

The first offense which Paul names is causing dissension and discord among the believers. Some people in the group were causing dissension, τὰς διχοστασίας, by promoting partially correct or false doctrines. These doctrines were contrary to teaching they had received from the apostles or their representatives. Paul does not specify the exact content of the false doctrines being presented. Such an activity could result in a division of the people into factions, because various groups were holding different positions on a doctrinal issue. The reference is to differ-

ences in more than just doctrine. He was referring to differences in both doctrine and practice because the latter originate in the former.<sup>1</sup> The divisive activity of such people had the potential of making unity and fellowship among individual believers impossible. In Matthew 18:7 Christ foretold such divisions would come and "had entailed a woe on those by whom they come."<sup>2</sup> Against such people, Paul is here cautioning the Roman Christians.

The second offense which Paul names is putting an opportunity for a believer to sin in his pathway. The word τὰ σκάνδαλα conveys the meaning of temptation to sin or to bring about temptations.<sup>3</sup> Such behavior as this, which possibly was tempting some to depart from the elements of the gospel as their basis for faith and practice, was not in accordance with the doctrinal teachings the Roman Christians had received from the apostles or from one of their representatives. This type of activity, precipitated by false doctrine, causes both inward and outward disunity between individual

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<sup>1</sup>William G. T. Shedd, A Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), p. 430.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew Henry, Acts to Revelation, Vol. VI of Commentary on the Whole Bible, (6 vols: Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 500.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 760.

believers but "apostolic doctrine never causes either inward or outward rents in the church."<sup>1</sup> Paul does not relate what was included in these temptations to sin or opportunities to fall. Regardless of what the exact problems were, they carried the potential dangers of alienating men from the pure truth and disrupting unity among believers.

In verse eighteen Paul states that individuals, like the ones he was describing in the previous verse, are very selfish. They do not serve Christ but their own appetites. The phrase τῇ ἐαντῶν κολίᾳ conveys the idea of selfish, sensuality and the pursuit of personal interests. These particular individuals were actually enslaved to selfish interests. The root of δουλεύουσιν, used here in the text, has this very meaning. They might have been outwardly rendering service to Christ, but inwardly they were deceitfully striving for personal attainment and self glory. The same word κολίᾳ is used in Philippians 3:19 where it is used when Paul is talking about people whose god is their personal appetite and selfish interests. Paul is not talking about errors of good men but the artful attempts of hypocrites and efforts of evil men who, under disguise of religion, are serving only themselves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), p. 917.

<sup>2</sup>Carl E. Elgena, The Cathedral of Our Faith - Studies in the Book of Romans, (Binghamton, New York: Niles and Phipps, n.d.), p. 30.

The fourth offense, intermingled with the first three such offenses, is deceiving others with eloquent but misleading words. The root of the verb in the text is ἐξαπατάω which means to deceive or to cheat someone.<sup>1</sup> The present tense suggests the activity was continuous and not an intermittent type of behavior.

The terms χρηστολογίας and εὐλογίας imply these offenders were masters at continuously using smooth, plausible speech and well chosen, but untrue words to flatter people into adopting their positions on issues.<sup>2</sup> Paul had just noted in verse seventeen that these individuals were involved in selfish, sensual pursuits and were sowing discord between individuals by spreading false doctrines. Here he is submitting the idea that since they use deceptive, flattering language they are actually heretical in their doctrine and hypocritical in their actions. Philippians 3:18,19; I Timothy 6:3-5; and Titus 1:10-12 illustrate the fact that "the union of sensuality with heresy is frequently spoken of in the New Testament."<sup>3</sup> Any such departure from correct doctrine leads to wrong practice.

The group which falls prey to this sinful activity

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<sup>1</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>3</sup>Shedd, A Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, p. 431.

is named in verse eighteen. Paul used the term τῶν ἀνάντων, which means innocent, guileless or unsuspecting.<sup>1</sup> The term is a genitive of possession which modifies τὰς καρδίας. καρδια represents the center and source of the whole inner life of man with its thinking, feeling and volition.<sup>2</sup> It could be understood then that these offenders were deceiving the minds of the unsuspecting, trusting members of the group. Paul evidently realized that in the church at Rome there were believers in the membership who were not yet well grounded in sound doctrine and were unaware of the potential activities of the wolves in sheep's clothing who might soon be operating in their midst. Since they were in this condition they were more liable to be impressed and taken in by the smooth, flattering speech and deceptive teachings of one of these individuals Paul is describing here. Paul was warning the Roman Christians of the fact that error often sounds reasonable and true to those believers who fall into the category of ἄνακος.

#### The Command

An urgent summons for help, παρακαλῶ, introduces Paul's discussion of the responsibility Roman believers had toward the above mentioned offenders. The second person

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<sup>1</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 404.

personal pronoun ὑμᾶς is significant. It serves the purpose of denoting the difference between the troublers and the faithful ones.<sup>1</sup> The potential troublers are referred to by the third person pronouns or as a group other than Paul and the faithful ones. The present infinitive σκοπεῖν is used to state the responsibility involved. The form used here could be classified as a command infinitive which has exactly the same force as a imperative form. The root of the infinitive used in this verse is σκοπέω, which means to look at something critically.<sup>2</sup> The only other use of σκοπέω in Paul's epistles occurs in Philippians 3:17 in the imperative form where Paul entreats the brethren at Philippi to mark those who conduct their lives according to the pattern they had seen in him and his fellow workers. He was urging them to observe carefully certain believers as models to follow.

In the Septuagint there occurs a similiar infinitive form, σκοπευεῖν, which is not used in the New Testament. It means "to have a watchful eye on"<sup>3</sup> something or someone. Paul is therefore urging the Roman Christians to notice carefully with a watchful, critical eye and to mark those people in

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<sup>1</sup>Handley C. G. Moule, "The Epistle of Paul to the Romans," Expositor's Bible, Vol. XIX, ed. by E. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Funk and Wagnells Company, 1900), p. 431.

<sup>2</sup>Ernst Fuchs, "σκοπέω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VII, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 414.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 415.

their midst who commit these offenses. He was in effect saying to his readers, pay close attention to and watch out for these individuals as one would closely watch the approach of a dangerous, wild animal.

Once these offenders have been marked or noticed, Paul used a present imperative to assert the next step in the process of an individual believer's responsibility. He uses the term ἐκκλίνετε which means, in its root form, to turn away or aside from, to avoid, to shun.<sup>1</sup> The same word, in the aorist imperative form, is used in I Peter 3:11 in reference to turning away from evil. The present tense of the imperative lends to the meaning the idea of continuing avoidance. It would appear, then, that the turning away from these false teachers was to be continual and decisive.<sup>2</sup> In ἐκκλίνετε there is no personal reference to official excommunication, but to personal treatment of those who might or might not be church members.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Paul's admonition is to turn away from them, meaning personal and social separation. The ἀπ' αὐτῶν which follows the imperative ἐκκλίνετε

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<sup>1</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup>David R. Nicholas, "The Biblical Doctrine of Separation (First and Second Degrees?)," Postgraduate Seminar Paper for New Testament Theology, Grace Theological Seminary, May, 1977, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>John Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures - Romans, trans. and ed. by Phillip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 449.

should be classified as a genitive of separation.

In verse nineteen Paul presents a distinct contrast from the two preceding verses. Earlier he had warned the Roman believers about bad things. Now he is complimenting them regarding good things and stating his desire. His final concern, regarding their responsibility toward these offenders, is that he desires them to be informed both about what is good and evil so as not to be deceived. He wanted them to be receptive inquirers into what is good and free from evil, which was contrary to true doctrine, so that evil would not be done. This is likely one reason why he included these comments.

Another reason for Paul's desires, conveyed to them in verse nineteen, was the influence of the church at Rome. Why should Paul warn the church about these offenders if they presented no major problem at that time? The answer to this question is because people all over the Roman Empire knew of this church and the willingness of the Christians there to work and to be taught. Paul knew that it would not be long before false teachers would converge on this church.<sup>1</sup> He did not want any false teachers to get into this church, to make a name for themselves and thus have the opportunity to lead many believers astray.

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<sup>1</sup>Alva J. McClain, Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace, compiled and ed. by Herman A. Hoyt (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p. 251.



## CHAPTER IV

### TITUS 3:10-11

#### The Background And Context

The Epistle to Titus was written by Paul, probably from Macedonia, to his reliable, faithful assistant Titus, who was directing the work in the church which Paul had started on the island of Crete. The theme of the epistle centers around church order and direction for the proper conduct in living the Christian life. Paul wrote to Titus to give him specific instructions about proper organization of the church on the island. He stressed the qualifications of elders, the need for thorough sanctification among the Cretan believers, the importance of maintaining sound doctrine, the specific ethical obligations of the different age groups and warned against false teaching. In chapter one, Paul dealt with principles essential to the congregational life in the Cretan church; in chapter two, principles regarding the family and individual life; and in chapter three, obligations pertaining to the public and social life of the Cretan Christians.

The two verses under consideration in this chapter occur in the concluding chapter of Titus where Paul sets forth several exhortations to godly living and warns his

readers about heretical teaching. The main emphasis of verses one through eight is Paul's encouragement for the people to be diligent in devoting themselves to doing what is good. In verse nine he takes special care to emphasize some activities in which they were not to be participating. Verses ten and eleven contain the warning about heretical teaching. The remaining verses consist of his conclusion to the epistle.

### The Offense

One offense is named in verse ten and three traits often characteristic of such a person are mentioned in verse eleven. The offender in verse ten is called a heretic, αἵρετικόν. The only usage of this noun form of the word in the New Testament occurs here in this verse.<sup>1</sup> The term αἵρετικός, in its Greek usage conveys the sense of "one who can choose aright."<sup>2</sup> In Christianity it seems to have been used technically from the very first and denotes the adherent of a heresy.<sup>3</sup>

This type of person is one who by his very nature causes divisions and factions to arise. He is a person very

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Young, Analytical Concordance To The Bible, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 477.

<sup>2</sup>H. Schlier, "αἵρετικός," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. I, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 184.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

opinionated in favor of idle theories he has originated or adopted. He is one who is quarrelsome and stirs up factions through erroneous opinions to form parties and factions.<sup>1</sup> This type of person is more concerned about gathering adherents to himself and maintaining some sectarian view of truth, than falling into line with the entire body of revelation.<sup>2</sup> The reason for such a person's heretical attitude is his refusal to listen to and abide with truth. Dr. Kent summarizes very well the meaning of the word and the nature of this kind of a person when he notes:

In the literal and original sense of the word, a heretic was one who makes a choice which pleases him, independent of other considerations. . . . In the realm of doctrine, a heretic denoted one who chose to follow doctrine contrary to that of the church. . . . Hence Paul in the letter to Titus means by this term the person or persons whose actions are divisive because they are contrary to the teaching of God's Word.<sup>3</sup>

Verse eleven gives further description about the nature of a heretic. The perfect passive indicative form of the root ἐκστρέχω appears in the text. The word means to turn aside, to pervert.<sup>4</sup> The form which is used is significant.

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<sup>1</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, Titus and Philemon, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>H. A. Ironside, Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle to Titus, (New York: Loizeauz Brothers, Inc., 1955), p. 273.

<sup>3</sup>Homer A. Kent Jr., The Pastoral Epistles, Studies in I and II Timothy and Titus, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 245.

<sup>4</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 244.

It conveys the thought that the person is actually in the process of being twisted or turned out of or away from the true Scriptural position, most likely by Satan or his demons (see I Timothy 4:1,2).<sup>1</sup> This person could be likened to a piece of lumber that is badly warped. It does not line up well with the straight pieces so that a division appears and other compatibility problems result.

The αἰρετικὸς is also said to be in the continual process of sinning, ἁμαρτάνει. He is transgressing and failing to line up with the Scriptural standard of conduct because he refuses to obey sound doctrine. The result of his continually sinning is that he is self condemned, αὐτοκατάκριτος. The term is derived from a combination of the word αὐτός which means self with κατάκρισις which means condemnation. His continual life of sin leaves him guilty and thus the "heretical man condemns himself by his persistence in his chosen course."<sup>2</sup>

The subject of the clause following ὅτι in verse eleven should again be noted, as it was in chapter two of this paper. The correlative pronoun τοιοῦτος is used with an article. When it occurs in this form it has a specific

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<sup>1</sup>Kent, The Pastoral Epistles, Studies in I and II Timothy and Titus, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

translation. It could properly be translated the one who is of such a character.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this usage of the pronoun is that a person of similiar character to the one described here is to be subjected to the same treatment as the heretical person is. A principle is therefore established that applies to a broader range of offenses of a similiar nature.

### The Command

The instructions, regarding personal responsibility toward a heretic, which Paul gave to Titus and the faithful Cretan believers are briefly stated in verse ten. They were to admonish him once and if that did not cause the offender to repent and change his behavior, they were to admonish him again. The thought conveyed by *νουθεσίαν* is that of admonition, instruction or warning.<sup>2</sup> The term is from the root *νουθετέω* which does not refer to casual communication or normal-type teaching. It implies a definite exhortation, correction, and warning.<sup>3</sup> This exhortation, or first and second admonition, is to include sharing in a sincerely concerned manner exactly what his sin is, teaching correct

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1885), p. 627.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 546.

<sup>3</sup>Gene A. Getz, Building Up One Another, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1977), p. 52.

doctrine to him and seeking to bring about a change in his behavior. If the heretic refuses to repent after such admonition, further instruction and warning probably would prove unprofitable and give the offender more publicity.

However, Paul states if this admonition fails the responsibility of the believers continues. This additional responsibility is summed up in the word παραίτου. It is a present imperative from the root παρατεῖναι which means to reject, dismiss or drive out.<sup>1</sup> The same word and form is used in I Timothy 4:7 where Paul is commanding Timothy to refuse profane and old wife's fables. A very correct translation and meaning of the word in this context is have nothing to do with.<sup>2</sup> The present imperative form indicates this responsibility is commanded and is to be continuous. After the person refuses to heed two admonitions the believers are to refuse to be bothered by this heretic and are to withdraw all further attention from him, leaving him to himself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 621.

<sup>2</sup>Charles J. Ellicott, A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, (Boston, Massachusetts: Draper and Halliday; reprinted, Minneapolis: James Family Christian Publishers, 1978), p. 263.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, Titus and Philemon, p. 75.

## CHAPTER V

### APPLICATION OF THIS RESPONSIBILITY OF SEPARATION

Every believer should be asking the question: What is involved in the practical application of my Biblical responsibility to withdraw from a brother who continues in sin even after he has been admonished? The purpose of this chapter is to set forth some basic factors for the believer to consider in the practical application of this responsibility toward brothers in Christ who continue in sin and will not repent after they have been admonished. Some of these factors for consideration occur in the listing which follows.

#### The Believer's Personal Obedience

The Scriptures considered in the preceding chapters clearly specify that a believer is commanded to withdraw from, avoid or reject those who commit certain offenses. Whether or not we understand why or agree with the command, we are under obligation to our Lord to obey His Word.<sup>1</sup> Jesus said, If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15). Obedience to God's Word is the measure of a

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<sup>1</sup>Paul R. Jackson, The Doctrine and Administration of The Local Church, (Des Plaines, Illinois: Regular Baptist Press, 1974), p. 77.

person's love for Him. The lack of it really exposes one who does not love the Lord with all of his heart, soul and mind. Partial obedience communicates the fact that a believer loves the offender or his sin or himself more than God. Obedience to doctrinal truth is important to God (Deut. 4:2, 12:32). It should not be any less important to believers. Biblical history testifies that doing things God's way and obeying Him are always best and the right course of action to follow. It is impossible to glorify God while being disobedient in not withdrawing from an offender who is clearly unrepentant and continuing in his sin.

#### The Believer's Productivity In His Life

In reality, the underlying factor determining a believer's productivity for God is his obedience to God. One can not be as fully productive in serving God if he is disobedient even in one area of his life. This one area of sin usually affects other areas of the Christian life. Disobedience to the commands of the Word, regarding separation from the disorderly, indicates a low love level for God and this very factor directly affects the Christian's productivity.

The degree to which productivity is hindered varies among different believers in different situations. However basic realities remain the same. There is a loss of power in the believer's prayer life and weaker saints result. There is the loss of the affect of his testimony to others,



and the loss of the opportunity to help a struggling brother in a Scriptural way. Disobedience allows greater opportunity for confusion to exist as to what is correct doctrine and practice. It also allows the occasion for other believers to stumble. In addition to these things, disobedience hinders the believer's ability to really worship God and glorify Him. The production of the fruit of the Spirit is less evident in a person's life and the works of the flesh are more likely to be manifest as the disobedient brother keeps company with the offender from whom he has been commanded to withdraw. Another devastating result of non-productive Christian lives, whether due to disobedience in this particular area of separation or some other area, is that local churches are much less productive than they could be in edification of the saints and evangelization of sinners.

There is no way to get around the fact that when believers keep company with obvious offenders, their own productivity and effectiveness in service for the Lord is reduced. Christ is simply not as clearly in focus in the center of the believer's life when such unsanctioned companionship is allowed. Or using an illustration similiar to one Christ might have used from the field of horticulture: Non-pruned branches shade the Son-light from producing branches and reduce their effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>O. Hallesby, The Christian Life, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1934), p. 67.

Believers must realize what any disobedience or sin does to their productivity and effectiveness in serving the Lord. Often one who does not take sin seriously does not take God very seriously for He hates sin. Many believers need to get God's perspective on sin entrenched in their minds (Amos 5:15a; Psalm 97:10). When this perspective becomes more of a reality in their hearts and minds and more obvious in the quality of their lives, the productivity of lives will increase and the offender who has been rejected will learn that "sin is a stench in the nostrils of Christian people."<sup>1</sup>

#### The Believer's Potential Pitfalls

Several potential pitfalls must be considered as a believer pursues his responsibility in separating from a disorderly brother. A number of these dangers could present a problem primarily because many believers are unaware that they exist. In the very mobil society of contemporary America, many people are exposed to new and varied theological trains of thought. This has opened up the danger of new unsound doctrinal concepts arriving in a Christian community from those just coming on the scene. Long standing believers have been and are being exposed to similiar new concepts during their normal weekly conversations and are being influenced by them. Quite often orthodox terms have been redefined

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<sup>1</sup>Roy E. Knuteson, Calling The Church To Discipline, (Nashville: Action Press, 1977), p. 99.

in the course of time and a speaker really does not mean what it sounds like he is saying.

In addition to this potential danger, many mass media sources of America increase the potential problem by continually disseminating more false doctrinal concepts, which are made to sound attractive and Scriptural by their promoters.<sup>1</sup> Also the philosophy of the new morality in America has permeated the thinking of Christian people more than many realize. This philosophy reduces sin from the serious offense which it really is to something that is acceptable because others are doing it. Most Christians do not take sin as seriously as God does. The result is that often they do not act at all or as quickly as they should in dealing with or separating from a sinning brother.

Another potential pitfall is the concept many believers possess about what it means to love one another. Again the philosophy of the world, in many cases, has replaced the Scriptural teaching in the minds of many Christians. These folks say, you are not loving an offending brother if you separate from him. How can such an offender ever be helped if you avoid him? They are forgetting that obedience to the Word of God is the ruler that should measure what it means to love one another. The Scripture states that believers

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<sup>1</sup>David R. Nicholas, "The Biblical Doctrine of Separation (First and Second Degrees?)," Postgraduate Seminar Paper for New Testament Theology, Grace Theological Seminary, May, 1977, p. 8.

are to separate from offenders, after they have been admonished and still remain in sin. This is God's truth. It must be obeyed by believers in this and all other areas. When it is not obeyed, compromise sets in and offenders often are not refused. This points to the fact that "truth cannot be perpetuated through compromise, and compromise cannot be avoided without separation."<sup>1</sup> The loving thing to do is to obey God and lovingly confront the offender about his sin and avoid him if he still continues in it. The non-loving thing to do is to let the brother continue in his sin, allowing the effects of his sin to continually burden him, others and you.

Another pitfall some believers have fallen into is that of thinking an offender will turn from his sin and improve instead of continuing in it and getting worse. This attitude has been adopted by some believers instead of realizing that a firm, uncompromising stand against sin is essential.<sup>2</sup> The fact of man's sin nature has proven offenders seldom improve. When offenders have the opportunity to continue in their sin, they become more persistent in evil while others are drawn in to the problem and contentious parties are formed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Whitcomb, "Biblical Fundamentalism," Course Syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, 1979, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Jackson, The Doctrine and Administration of the Church, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>Edward T. Hiscox, The Standard Manual For Baptist Churches, (Chicago: American Baptist Publication Society, 1936), p. 28.

Two other opposite pitfalls should be mentioned.

One is the danger of too quickly accusing an offender without making sure of the nature and seriousness of his sin. A believer must not go to the extreme of removing himself from another brother for every little offense. There is no hint given in Scripture that first century Christians sought to rid their midst entirely of sin for every minor deviation of conduct.<sup>1</sup> The opposite is not being alert enough to notice problems and watch for the beginnings of strife or divisiveness.

The pitfall of partiality has the potential of taking a great toll on relationships among believers. Personal relationships to friends and relatives make the responsibilities commanded in separation even more difficult and have the force of placing a great strain on a believer's faithfulness to God. However, in the matter of withdrawing from a disorderly brother, "these principles of obedience must be kept free from personalities."<sup>2</sup>

A pitfall that could entangle some believers is that of becoming proud of their good life and thus almost legalistic in their separation from a brother committing a serious

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<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Saucy, The Church In God's Program, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>Jackson, The Doctrine and Administration of the Church, p. 81.

offense. The Biblical doctrine of separation must not be twisted into a legalistic and proud spirit of isolation.<sup>1</sup> Neither is the believer to keep himself aloof from a sinning brother with a spirit of anger against him. Also caution must be taken not to use verses on separation to remove those who differ from us, but instead those who differ from the Word.<sup>2</sup> The proper attitudes of spirituality, humility and meekness must mark those who undertake to deal Scripturally with a fallen brother.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, believers might fall into the trap of using any of a number of excuses to escape their Biblical responsibility of withdrawing from a brother continuing in sin. Some of the more common ones could be: It is not my business; I am not qualified morally; I do not have enough training; Jesus said not to judge; I will talk it over with someone else first; the problem will go away by itself; I might do wrong; or I do not have time.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of whichever excuse is used, most likely an underlying problem is that the person making the excuse is guilty of disobedience to the clear commands of Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup>Whitcomb, "Biblical Fundamentalism," p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Jackson, The Doctrine and Administration of the Church, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>4</sup>John White, "The Discipline That Heals," Moody Monthly, 78:6 (February, 1978), 59.

### The Believer's Procedure In Separation

One of the primary purposes for withdrawing from or avoiding a sinning brother is to help maintain purity of life in a believer and to keep the individual from defilement. Purity can only be preserved by obedience to the Word of God and severing the unrepentant person from fellowship. Three references which teach this principle are Proverbs 13:20, I Corinthians 15:33 and Galatians 5:9. The believer who is going to be obedient to this command of God must believe the lesson history teaches that men have not changed and are going to sin. If an offender is not dealt with and avoided the believer who knows about the offender's sin is simply condoning it, encouraging the person in his sin and in effect saying the sin really is not that bad.

The procedure of separation requires keen alertness of existing situations, sensitivity toward sin and one's personal heart motive, proper timing and great courage. If the offender is handled bitterly or harshly the action of the separation is sin. The very action of separation should remind a believer of his own propensity toward sin and warn him of its consequences.<sup>1</sup> The action must be taken as soon as a believer is sure it must be done. Serious problems, if not handled Biblically, get worse not better, as time passes.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Saucy, The Church In God's Program, p. 126.

The lack of dealing with problems drives deeper wedges between believers.<sup>1</sup> It must be conveyed to the offender that the action of separation is attacking the problem of his sin not him personally. The action is to show disapproval of his inconsistent life.

The believer who separated must be aware of the fact that the process will hurt, just as surgery to remove a diseased organ hurts. However, it is necessary to prevent even more damage and deterioration. It must be remembered that obedience heals pain. The obedient believer will be assured he did the right thing even though the offender may not repent or may be very bitter toward him. Sometimes the withdrawal from such a person is the only kind of communication he will understand.

A key principle in the procedure in separation is that believers must back one another in activities of this nature. If they are not united in purpose on this matter, strife and divisions will arise very rapidly. Therefore it is essential for all believers to be Biblically obedient to this command if it is going to accomplish the purpose which God intends it to accomplish.

A second primary purpose of the separation process is to assist the disorderly person in bringing him to repentance

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<sup>1</sup>J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Whatever Happened to Church Discipline?" Christianity Today, 18:13 (March 29, 1974), 8.



and restoring him to fellowship, both with God and the other believers who shunned him. The ultimate goal of separation must be the eventual restoration of the erring brother. During the period of avoiding the offender, the believer must be praying for opportunities to deal with the one he has put out and at the same time be seeking his restoration. There is ultimate joy involved in seeing a brother restored and knowing one has been obedient to the Word of God.

Finally, the repentant sinner restored to fellowship must be readily forgiven. To God forgiving is forgetting (Jer. 31:34). To a believer forgiving must mean the same thing.

#### The Believer's Priority In Indoctrination

A serious situation confronts Christianity today. Thousands of believers across America are faithfully following false teachings or partial truths, which have been taught in their local churches or gained from exposure to one of the many different religious groups which now exist. Many other believers have only a shallow understanding of the basic truths of the Word of God. In either situation when sound doctrine is not known and followed wrong practice results. In addition to this, principles and commands of Scripture are not practiced and consequently confusion and disobedience are the primary products.

Individual believers, especially leaders in a local church, must realize how vitally important it is for Christians

to continually be taught sound Biblical doctrine so that they will know their Biblical responsibility in this area of separation and also in all other areas of Christian living. When believers have been indoctrinated in Biblical truth, there is no legitimate excuse for ignorance in their Christian practice or disobedience to the truth. In the area of separation, many disastrous problems could have been avoided if the principles of the Word had been followed from the initial indication of trouble.

#### The Believer's Part In Church Discipline

God's primary means of doing His work today is through individual believers working together in a local church. In many instances the church is a partial means by which a believer fulfills his responsibility in separating from a disorderly brother. Often it is difficult to distinguish individual responsibility in separation from church action in disciplining an offender. In the four passages under consideration in this paper, believers who unite together in either an official or unofficial church action can be more effective in carrying out whichever step in the separation process that is necessary.

It should be remembered that a matter of church discipline generally is in view in these passages. This is especially the case in the I Corinthians and II Thessalonians

passages. However, each individual believer has a part to perform for the action to bring about the desired results.<sup>1</sup> Though the ultimate authority for church discipline rests upon the decision of the body as a whole, the control of it is in the hands of the people who personally must know their own obligation and the duty of the church.<sup>2</sup>

The reason why church discipline and personal separation efforts often fail is basically simple. Church discipline fails because it has not been supported by enough individual believers.<sup>3</sup> Individual separation fails because many believers do not take these commands seriously and do not fulfill their responsibility. A real problem is created because the offender can go for fellowship to another church or to other believers where the command to withdraw from an offending brother is not obeyed. By their negligent behavior these folks give the offenders a false sense of security and assist the church in failing to be all it should be to its members.

Many church people are more concerned about their reputations, the programs of the church, or a building program than for the spiritual state of offending brothers in

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<sup>1</sup>Nicholas, "The Biblical Doctrine of Separation (First and Second Degrees?)," p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Saucy, The Church In God's Program, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Hitchman, Some Scriptural Principles of the Christian Assembly, (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Richie, Ltd., n.d.), p. 129.

their midst. Therefore, seldom are the facts laid out to the offender and the proper action is not taken.<sup>1</sup> When such attitudes exist and the sinful behavior of an offender is condoned, disunity reigns in the church and its productive service for the Lord is greatly diminished. When secondary areas become of primary importance, often sin is not being properly confronted, divisions occur, fighting breaks out and both potential and present church members do not return.

Biblical separation from disorderly believers has been commanded in the Word of God to help maintain the welfare of individuals. When individual believers are themselves spiritually healthy, they are more likely to be involved in a healthy, productive church which is Biblically disciplining disorderly members in its midst.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion

The passages examined in this paper teach that offenders, who will not repent of their sins after efforts have been extended to regain them, are to be avoided, even driven away as long as they persist in their disobedient behavior. The object of this chapter has been to discuss some factors in the practical application of this God-given responsibility. It must be remembered that each individual case, where an offense exists similar to the ones listed in these four

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<sup>1</sup>White, "The Discipline That Heals," p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>Saucy, The Church In God's Program, p. 126.

passages, must be considered separately from other cases. The basic Biblical principles must be used as the standard. Somehow in each situation, the possibility of occasional contact with the isolated offender must be kept open for the purpose of spiritual counsel, instruction or admonition. The Holy Spirit alone can bring about change in the offenders and direct believers in the separation process.

The ultimate goal of withdrawal is restoration. However, the fact remains that some offenders may never repent of their sins and could subject an obedient believer to terrible enmity as long as he lives. God's plan for believers, to have fellowship with Him and with one another, can only be fulfilled as believers are obedient to His commandments, separation from disorderly brothers included.

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