



Church Principles of the New Testament

As Practiced by
Early Brethren

Vol. II

B.P. Harris

Church Principles of the New Testament

As Practiced by
Early Brethren

Vol. II

CHURCH UNITY, CHURCH DISCIPLINE

B.P. Harris

Assembly Bookshelf
Sacramento

All Scriptures are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE,
Copyright©1960, 1962, 1963,
1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission.”

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Some Scriptural texts are sourced from: BibleWorks™ Copyright © 1992-2008 BibleWorks, LLC. All rights reserved. BibleWorks was programmed by Michael S. Bushell, Michael D. Tan, and Glenn L. Weaver. All rights reserved. Bible timelines Copyright © 1996-1999 BibleWorks, LLC. All rights reserved. Map datasets Copyright © 2005 BibleWorks, LLC: source of underlying data for some of the images was the Global Land Cover Facility, <http://www.landcover.org>. Detailed Jerusalem image Copyright © 2005 TerraServer.com. All rights reserved.

The following versions and works are referenced from BibleWorks:

The English Translation of The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, 1844, 1851, published by Samuel Bagster and Sons, London, original ASCII edition Copyright © 1988 by FABS International (c/o Bob Lewis, DeFuniak Springs FL 32433). All rights reserved. Used by permission. Apocryphal portion not available. Copyright © 1998-1999, by Larry Nelson (Box 2083, Rialto, CA, 92376). Used by permission

The English Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible 1862/1887/1898, by J. N. Young. ASCII version Copyright © 1988-1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada. Licensed from the Institute for Creation Research. Used by permission.

The Tyndale New Testament (1534) - Scholars have regarded the 1534 edition as Tyndale's definitive version of the New Testament. Though in 1535 he did issue another edition, the 1534 edition remains his crowning work. The text was entered by Mark Langley.

Scripture quotations marked HCSB are been taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers”

Complete Jewish Bible. Copyright © 1998 by David H. Stern. Published by Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc. [www/messianicjewish.net/jntp](http://www.messianicjewish.net/jntp). Distributed by Messianic Jewish Resources International. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

“Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation. Copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers

Unless otherwise noted, all Greek Scriptures from the New Testament are taken from—

BYZ - Robinson-Pierpont Majority Text GNT 1995. Produced by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont. Public Domain. Accented. The Robinson-Pierpont is a modern (1995) attempt at producing a reliable Majority Text version of the Greek New Testament.

These books are free as the Lord provides. Please limit one per household. They are available from:

(Please note – At this time, this book is only available in digital format)

Assembly Bookshelf
P.O. Box 15086
Sacramento, CA 95851 USA

This book may be freely copied, duplicated or printed in any form, digital, paper, or any other format, in part or in whole—but if desired in part, only if reference is made to the whole.

Copyright © 2019 by the Author

Table of Contents

BOOK ONE

CHURCH UNITY

Prerequisites for Keeping the Unity of the Spirit	7
The Bond of Peace	11
The Problem of Manifesting the Unity of the Spirit Down through the Centuries	20
Separation from Evil in Scripture	28
J. N. Darby's Misapplication of Separation from Evil	35
Why Separation from Evil Was Not the Basis for the Unity of the Spirit in the Church	68
God's True Principle of Unity within the Godhead	77
God's True Principle of Unity for the Church Revealed in John 17	87
Some Grammatical Considerations	87
The First Part—John 17: 1-10	92
The Second Part—John 17: 11-26	102
The Name of the Father—vs. 11-20	102
The Sanctification of the Son—vs. 17-21	116
The Glory of His Life—vs. 22-26	137
The Unity of the Spirit Expressed in Fellowship	157
Liberty of Judgment in Fellowship	161
Limits of Expression in Fellowship	190
Extent of Fellowship	215
Concluding Remarks on the Unity of the Spirit	220

BOOK TWO

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

The Importance of Discipline	237
Societal Sins—I Corinthians 5:1-13	243
Doctrinal Sins—II John 1:7-11	264
Personal Sins—Matthew 18:15-22	307
Determining the Sins in Question	310
Grammatical Aspects of the Passage	316
Concluding Remarks	376
Heretical Sins—Titus 3:10-11	381
Party Sins—Romans 16:17	404
Self-serving Sins—I Timothy 6:1-5	416
Apostasy—II Tim. 3:1-8	429
Prideful Sins—II Thess. 3:6-12	447
Disorderly Sins—II Thess. 3:14	453

BOOK ONE

CHURCH UNITY

PREREQUISITES FOR KEEPING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Ephesians 4:1-3 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ² **With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;** ³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. KJV

Paul reveals in his epistle to the Ephesians that every Christian should endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. However, he also reveals those prerequisites which must accompany this endeavour. These are a walk characterized by lowliness, meekness, patience, and, most importantly, a walk characterized by forbearing love. These four characteristics cannot be minimized in the walk of the believer if he or she wishes to keep the unity of the Spirit. However, many times these four characteristics are completely ignored by those who are the most zealous for this unity. Unfortunately, rather than being lowly, such Christians many times become puffed up in their pursuit of oneness. They become spiritually proud; they purport to be the only Christians who are really maintaining the unity of the Spirit. As such, rather than being meek or gentle, as Paul exhorts, they are harsh and critical of other believers. Rather than being longsuffering with their brethren, they are impatient with other Christians, demanding submission to their views and interpretations. And, rather than being forbearing in love, their love becomes the opposite. Their love may endure for every Christian who might agree with them, but their love becomes short-lived for everyone who will not. As such, their love is not really an expression of the love of Christ, which is both longsuffering and forbearing (for Christ died for hostile sinners in utter rebellion from Him—Rom. 5:6-10) but rather their love is an expression of a love, straitened by misplaced and self-righteous zeal.

Without these four attributes mentioned by Paul, especially the last attribute of forbearance, it is all but impossible for one to truly maintain the unity of the Spirit, for if one's walk is deficient of these characteristics, the opposite characteristics are shown in the heart of the saint—spiritual pride, a critical spirit, impatience, and a merciless and

self-righteous intolerance toward those who might not agree. We must all guard our hearts from these opposing characteristics, for if those characteristics fill the heart of the believer, the true unity of the Spirit is all but fleeting and all but impossible to be expressed. Why is this so? The answer is because the unity of the Spirit is none other than an expression of the very life of Christ and if those four attributes mentioned by Paul are not being expressed, that means Christ is not being expressed, living His life in us, and if Christ is not living His life in us, it means we are living by our own soulical religious life, which may indeed, be moral, but certainly is not spiritual.

As such, since Christ's love was filled with lowliness, meekness, and much longsuffering, the Holy Spirit's love will be filled with lowliness, meekness, and much longsuffering, which means, if a Christian claims to walk by the Spirit, their love should also be filled with lowliness, meekness, and much longsuffering. And not only that, since Christ's love was filled with much forbearance, the Spirit's love is always full of much forbearance, which means, if we as Christians claim to walk by the Spirit, our love should be filled with much forbearance.

Forbearance is so important to a walk that endeavors to keep the unity of the Spirit. It is most unfortunate that some Christians will only emphasize the latter (the unity of the Spirit) while completely ignoring the former (forbearance). But Paul's exhortation begins with the former, not the latter.

Perhaps, it might help us if we better understand this Greek verb translated forbearing. W. E. Vine defines it as follows (first under its verbal form, then also the nominal form of the word).

“A. Verbs 1. ANECHO (ἀνέχω), to hold up (*ana*, up, *echō*, to have or hold), is used in the Middle Voice in the N.T., signifying to bear with, endure; it is rendered ‘forbearing (one another)’ in Eph. 4:2 and Col. 3:13...Cp. B, No. 1, below.”

“B. Nouns ANOCHE (ἀνοχή) a holding back (akin to A, No. 1), denotes forbearance, a delay of punishment, Romans 2:4 ; 3:25 , in both places of God's forbearance with men...in Romans 3:25 it is connected with the passing over of sins in times past, previous to the atoning work of Christ...Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger and is associated with mercy, and is used of God, Exodus 34:6 , Sept., Romans 2:4 ; I Peter 3:20 . Patience is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial; it is the

opposite of despondency and is associated with hope, in I Thessalonians 1:3; it is not used of God.”¹

Forbearance, then, in our relationships with other believers, is a quality that “holds back.” It is not so quick to judge. It is swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19). It does so, not because of a toleration of sin, but rather, because of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctify every true believer. It does so, not because of a less than righteous attitude toward evil, but rather, because of faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ and the power of his blood in the life of every true believer. It does so, not because of a lack of zeal for God, but rather, because of a zeal that is tempered by knowledge, knowledge of one’s own lack of righteousness, and one’s need for sanctification, and one’s faith in the righteousness of Christ. It does so, because it knows that if Christ exercised the same zeal toward us that we exercise toward others, we, ourselves, could never stand!

And so, beloved, we see that God’s principle of unity begins with those who walk worthy of their calling, those who are filled with lowliness, a humbleness of spirit, meekness, a gentleness of heart that fully knows its own weakness and failings, and so is patient and longsuffering with fellow believers who are weak and who are in need of sanctification. And finally, God’s principle of unity, the unity of the Spirit, begins with one who is forbearing in love, willing to forgive, willing to cover a multitude of sins, willing to admonish one to sanctification and to exhort one to righteousness.

If we purport to be Christians who are anxious to maintain and to manifest the unity of the Spirit in our Assemblies, we must be sure, by God’s grace to be filled to the brim with these essential qualities of the Spirit, which are the same qualities of Christ, and which are the qualities of a merciful Father who showed mercy to us by giving His Only-Begotten Son to die for our sins.

Romans 3:21-26 But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,²² even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴

¹ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. II, pg. 116-117

being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. ***This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;***²⁶ for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. NASB

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, But **love covers all transgressions.** NASB

I Peter 4:7-8 The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer.⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, **because love covers a multitude of sins.** NASB

Proverbs 19:11 A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression. NASB

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. NASB

Without these four qualities of the Spirit, dear brethren, our zeal will become unbalanced and extreme, our righteousness will become self-inflated and Pharisaical, our love will become measured and reserved (doled out only to those who will agree with us), and our testimony will become filled with nothing but arrogance and pride. To such, the unity of the Spirit will become nothing more than a unity of forced intimidation and false spirituality (for the attributes of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearance will be missing or in short supply). This is the first step required in one who endeavors to maintain and to express the unity of the Spirit—to understand the failing of one's own heart in the light of Christ's righteousness and holiness, and then in that light to walk lowly, to walk meekly, to walk with patience, and to walk with forbearance and love.

And that brings us to Paul's next point. After listing the four prerequisites for keeping the unity of the Spirit in love, Paul then reveals to those in Ephesus the principle or the state in which that unity must be kept—the bond of peace. And it is to that which we would now like to turn our attention.

The Bond of Peace

Ephesians 4:1-3 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ² With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; ³ **Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** KJV

What does Paul mean by the bond of peace? To answer that question we first need to understand the meaning of the Greek word for *bond* that is used by Paul, the Greek word σύνδεσμος. It is variously translated (depending on the context and version) as something that binds two things together. The same Greek word is used in Col. 2:19 where it is translated as “ligaments” in the NASB and “bands” in the KJV.

Colossians 2:19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and **ligaments**, grows with a growth which is from God. NASB

Colossians 2:19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and **bands** having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. KJV

Our English word ligament (bands) is defined as follows:

“A short **band** of tough, flexible fibrous connective tissue which connects two bones or cartilages or holds together a joint.” ²

I wanted to give this English definition, not because the English word is inspired. Of course, it was not; but I wanted to provide it because the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use a Greek word for a part of the body that perhaps, Paul, himself, as a first century human being, might not fully understand from a medical perspective. (But, of course, the Holy Spirit knew.) Consequently, since our medical knowledge of the human body is greater now than it was in the first century, a modern English definition of that part of the body might be helpful in gaining a fuller understanding of the function and characteristics of that part of the human body chosen by the Holy Spirit to bespeak this spiritual truth of regarding the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ..

² Angus Stevenson, ed., Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010) pg. 1021

As such, it is very interesting that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use this Greek word, because ligaments (bands) must be very strong, yet also flexible if the body is to operate correctly. For example, if the ligaments within the leg are not *flexible* enough, one's walk or mobility will be greatly hindered. Conversely, if one's ligaments are flexible but not very *strong*, certain situations which require much exertion (e.g. competing in the games, as Paul references in I Cor. 9:24-25) might result in injury—in other words, using Paul's imagery of a race in I Cor. 9:24, one might not be able to finish a race if the body is injured because of a weak ligament!

In the same way, using this same imagery of the body of Christ, if we are not **flexible** enough in our bond or band with our brethren, we will hinder the walk of others and will hinder the overall health of the Body of Christ which is His Church. On the other hand, if we are not **strong** enough in our bond or band with each other in the Assembly, if we are so easily offended that we stand aloof from our brethren, we will also hinder the Body of Christ and so weaken the unity of the Spirit, which is kept in a bond or band of peace. It is so important to maintain a strong, yet flexible bond with our brethren.

In this way, as Paul says, the Body of Christ will grow with a growth which is from God. We will be **strong** in our commitments to each other, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as [we] see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25 NASB). And we will be **flexible**, with that “wisdom that is from above,” which is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17 KJV).

So, now that we understand the nature of what Paul meant by a “bond,” how then should we understand the entire phrase “the bond of peace?” This Greek phrase is made up two articular nouns—ἐν τῷ **συνδέσμῳ** τῆς **εἰρήνης**. Literally, we could translate it as—in the bond of the peace. The first noun (bond) is in the dative case construing with the preposition ἐν (in). The second noun (peace) is in the genitive case construing with συνδέσμων (bond).

Now since Greek is an inflected language, it is important to understand the varied nuances of the Greek case. In our phrase above, the dative case (along with the preposition) is used to bespeak the state in which we exist, or the state into which we have been brought, whereas the genitive

case in our phrase can either define the head noun as a modifier, or stand in apposition with that noun. Thus it could be understood as *in the bond that is peace*, or, because of its articular nature it could be understood appositionally as, *in the bond, the peace*. On the other hand, it is also possible to understand the genitive as a subject with the head noun being understood verbally, in which case the phrase would be rendered into Greek as the peace that binds us.

Thus one can understand Paul's exhortation as—

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit **in the peace that binds us.**”

Or as—

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit **in the bond that is peace.**”

In the former, the emphasis is on the *peace*, whereas, in the latter, the emphasis is on the *bond*. However, in both cases it still is the *peace* which underlies this unity. Thus, with either translation, Paul is declaring that the unity of the Spirit exists because we have been brought into a state of peace. So, the question that remains is what does Paul mean by this peace, and how does this bring about the unity of the Spirit? To answer that question, of course, we must look to the context of the entire epistle, regarding peace, which we will now do by God's grace.

The first mention of peace is found in Eph. 1:2.

Ephesians 1:2 Grace *be* to you, and **peace**, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

In this verse we first find that our state of peace is from God our Father. This tells us two things. First, it tells us that one of the reasons we should keep the unity of the Spirit is because God is our Father! What a shame it is for siblings to ignore the fact that we are all brethren. We have one Father, and with any father, He desires that we all walk together as His children, as a happy and unified family or household, in which we will

always forebear one another in love. But it also goes a little deeper in that it causes one to wonder how one can actually have God as a Father and be brought into a state of peace. The answer, of course, is by faith, just as Paul declares in Rom. 5:1.

Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ: KJV

Therefore, the first mention of peace in the immediate context of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians identifies that peace as that quality we receive from God our Father, because we have been brought into a special relationship with Him by faith (as Paul declares in Rom. 5:1), which faith Paul also affirms a few verses later in Eph. 1: 13-16—

Ephesians 1: 13-16 In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. ¹⁵ Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, ¹⁶ Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. KJV

Thus, apart from faith in the gospel of salvation, the unity of the Spirit would never even be possible for a human being, for we would never exist in a state of peace with God as our Father to have a bond to keep us one. Thus by being born again to a new life, by being made members of God's household, we have peace with God which brings us into oneness. Have you been brought into this state of peace dear reader? If not, turn to God right now and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and you will be saved.

The next instance of peace, leading up to Paul's declaration in Eph. 4:3, is found in the next chapter, chapter two, in three different verses, which we will quote below.

Ephesians 2:11-18 Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ **For he is our peace**, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; ¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in

himself of twain one new man, **so making peace;**¹⁶ And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:¹⁷ And came and **preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.**¹⁸ For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.
KJV

The first instance of peace in chapter one declares that our peace comes from being in relationship with God our Father. In this second chapter Paul now tells us the reason that relationship is even possible.

In verse 13 of chapter two Paul declares that the blood of Christ has made it possible for Gentiles (and by implication those of Israel who believe) to be brought nigh to God. And, after declaring this He provides the answer as to why the blood of Christ can accomplish this; he says that it is because Christ Jesus is our peace (vs. 14). And not only that, he declares that he has made both Jew and Gentile one in Him. This is unity. His blood brings about oneness or unity because peace has been established with God.

Then, next in verse 15, Paul tells us how that peace with God was possible. He says it was because the enmity was abolished in His flesh, which he identifies as the law of commandments in ordinances. In his epistle to the Colossians Paul says the same thing this way:

Colossians 2:13-14 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;¹⁴ Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross, KJV

In other words, the reason peace with God is possible is because Christ paid the debt of our sins. The Law of God required a price to be paid for disobedience and sin; but it also promised blessing and life for obedience and perfection. Every human being, whether Jew and Gentile, failed miserably in the latter, and so, unfortunately, they remained bound in the sin and death of the former. We all had a debt to pay to God for failing to reach His standard of righteousness (as evidenced in the Law) and that debt was sin and death. But God be praised, Christ did away with that enmity, that handwriting against us, leaving it nailed to the cross with the words written across it— PAID IN FULL!

In Paul's epistle to the Romans he stated the same thing as follows—

Romans 8:1-4 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ⁴ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Beloved, this is the peace that He won for us. His blood that was shed upon the cross paid the debt for our sins, allowing God to forgive us every single sin we ever committed or ever will commit. His blood cleansed us from all unrighteousness, allowing God to righteously bestow His peace upon us because His Son paid it all. This allowed Him to receive us into His household. This allowed Him to beget us to a living hope (I Pet. 1:3), making us His children (John 1:12-13). This allowed Him to reconcile us both, Jew and Gentile unto God in one body by the cross, as Paul declares in verse 16. This is our true unity, a unity that was gained upon the cruel cross of Calvary. It cost Him dearly to win it for us. As such, how can we ever treat it lightly?

And then finally, the last mention of peace before we reach Eph. 4:3 is found in verse 17 of chapter two, which states that Christ then announced or preached this peace of salvation to those who were near and far. This was the prophetic promise spoken by the LORD in Isa. 57:19 to those who are of a broken and contrite heart, who put no trust in their own good works or righteousness, but only looked to the good work and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross.

Isa. 57:12-13, 15, 19 I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee. ¹³ When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take *them*: **but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain;** ¹⁵ For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, **with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit**, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. ¹⁹ I create the fruit of the lips; **Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near**, saith the LORD; and I will heal him. KJV

Christ preached this peace of forgiveness and new life, first to those in Israel (e.g. the five hundred to whom He appeared before His ascension to heaven, as Paul revealed in I Cor. 15:1-8) and then to the Gentiles, not directly, of course, as He did with the five hundred in Israel, but

indirectly from heaven, in and through His apostles, including Paul, as he declared in II Cor. 13:3.

II Corinthians 13:3 since you are seeking for proof of **the Christ who speaks in me**, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. NASB

This is what leads up to Paul declaring to both Jewish and Gentile believers in Ephesus that they should endeavour “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”—in that peace of forgiveness made possible by the shed blood of Christ upon the cross, in that peace of new life gained by being born again to a living hope in Christ Jesus, wherein God is our Father and we are His children in one household, the household of God.

So, beloved now we can fully understand what Paul means by keeping the unity of the Spirit **in the bond of peace**, a strong bond of peace because the blood of Christ has secured for us eternal redemption by His sacrifice upon the cross. Nothing can sever that bond of peace that we have with God by faith. It is an eternal bond that will never fade away for it is secured by the blood of Christ that was shed for us upon that cruel cross. How could we ever be divided from our brethren seeing that we have been made children of God forever by new birth, all because His precious blood was shed for us upon the cross?

Is it not, in one sense, an affront to the efficacy of His blood to not keep that hard won unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? If the sacrifice is eternal, being done once for all, if the peace is eternal, being based upon eternal redemption, how could we ever be divided now upon earth, if we are already eternally united together?

Moreover, how wonderful it is that the bond of peace is also flexible? Why?—because His peace is given to those who are of a broken and contrite spirit. It is given to the humble, to the ones who understand the depths of their sin, who understand that they truly were dead in their trespasses and sin and are need of salvation, and so believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. How could one not be flexible in love, seeing that the peace of the Lord is given to us, who do not deserve such a great gift? Is it not the Lord who said of the women in the Pharisee’s house?—

Luke 7:47-50 Wherefore I say unto thee, **Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.** ⁴⁸ And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. ⁴⁹ And they that sat at meat

with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? ⁵⁰
And he said to the woman, **Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.**

The Pharisee, who is named Simon in the story, was inflexible toward the woman, for he was filled with self-righteousness. The Lord Jesus in the story was flexible in love and righteous with forgiveness, for He knew the woman's heart and her love and faith. So He said to her, "Go in peace."

Only the proud of heart, only those who "justify themselves" in self-righteousness, will be incapable of keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, all because, perhaps, they do not realize how utterly sinful they really are, and so do not realize how much they are still in need of forgiveness for things they may not even be aware (cf. Ps. 139:23-24). And because of that they will have limited love to give, for true love will be willing to cover a multitude of sins in forgiveness and will be "peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17 KJV).

In fact, love is so closely tied up with the unity of the Spirit that Paul even calls love a bond or band also, using the same Greek word (σύνδεσμος) in Col. 3:14—"And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (NASB). If we truly understand the darkness of our own hearts, how could we ever not keep the unity of the Spirit in that peace and love that binds us through His shed blood? If it binds us forever, it certainly should bind us now!

In one sense, we can say that those four attributes of Christ that should always be manifested in us—lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearing love—are the only "means" whereby the unity of the Spirit is maintained, while the blood of Christ that won for us the bond of peace is the underlying foundation of that unity of the Spirit. Both are important and necessary if we are to please the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, ever loving each other in the unity that has been purchased for us by the giving love of the Father who gave His Only-Begotten Son, by the precious blood of the Lamb, who, as the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for the sheep, and by the Blessed and eternal Holy Spirit through whom our Lord offered up His body upon the cross.

And so in conclusion, dear brethren, we can see that the unity is so much bigger than us or our personal opinions, or petty squabbles. The unity of the Spirit was gained by the precious blood of the lamb. If we treat it so

lightly, if we cause divisions or troubles, if we so easily leave an Assembly because of some personal umbrage, it shows how little we understood the tremendous sacrifice and love it took to produce this bond, this bond of peace. In reality, it is almost as if we belittle the work of the Saviour, if we act in such a way, for it puts our own desires above His sacred desire for the oneness and unity of His Body, which is the Assembly.

The Problem of Manifesting the Unity of the Spirit Down through the Centuries

In light of what we learned from the previous chapter, Christians intuitively know we should be one with every fellow believer, because we all are part of the household of God. Throughout Church History, keeping the unity of the Spirit has always been the noble goal of every Christian. Unfortunately, however, except for the first century, this goal has mostly failed.

Now, that is not to say that there has been a local Church, now and again, throughout the subsequent centuries of this dispensation, who have, indeed, been able to maintain the unity of the Spirit (although on a very small scale) but they are mostly unknown and obscure to the minds of most, for they never sought to magnify their own name or their own Church, but rather, in lowliness of spirit, they sought to only magnify the name of the Lord.

And, indeed, there have also been well-known attempts by Churches to maintain this unity of the Spirit, the most visible attempt being that made by the Roman Catholic Church—but their attempt was and is an artificial attempt, for their unity is based upon man-made traditions that are enforced by canon law, and not by the bond of peace won for us by Christ. Other, less visible attempts and less known attempts have also been made by various Orthodox communities, such as the Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc. While these are less presumptuous in their scope than that of the Roman Catholic Church, they are none the less also based upon, ancient, but nevertheless man-made traditions in opposition to God's Word, and are sometimes divided according to ethnic lines.

Then, beginning in the sixteenth century, there have also been multiple attempts at unity by various denominations. But, although they may have fared better in some ways, and fared less in others ways, than the aforementioned Churches, they too failed, not necessarily because of ancient man-made traditions that were codified into canon law, but, rather because of their “denominational mindsets”. By definition, the unity of the Spirit must include every true believer and not just with those who might agree with certain non-essential interpretations of Scripture. And so if a true believer from one denomination is denied

fellowship or acceptance of membership into another denomination, because such a one still holds to the principles of their aforementioned denomination, then by definition the unity of the Spirit is not being expressed, for the unity of the Spirit must be a unity that welcomes and includes every blood-bought member of the body of Christ, whose only requirement for membership in the local Church, is membership in the universal Church.

But, God be praised, during this same period there were still other Churches, like those little known Churches of centuries past, who were a little more successful in reaching their goal of maintaining the unity of the Spirit. Many Churches who later became known as Baptist Churches, did maintain a semblance of the unity of the Spirit in their small Assemblies. At first, they refused to take the name Baptist, ascribed to them by other Churches, preferring, instead, the simple designation of Christian, seeking to be inclusive rather than exclusive. They attempted to obey only the Word of God, and not man-made traditions, and so were desirous of welcoming every true believer into their midst. But, unfortunately, over time they succumbed to the name so frequently ascribed to them, and so, were soon adopting the same type of denominational mindsets as others.

Over time, they slowly adopted the name Baptist, having no qualms in “denominating” the body of Christ, as did those Churches before them. And so, some became very exclusive in their outlook, and soon lost their ability to fully manifest the unity of the Spirit, because they divided up the body of Christ between those who were Baptist, and those who were not.

And so this period of Church History, wherein many Churches began to denominate themselves, also failed to bring about any lasting manifestation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. For the most part, although they were able to escape the shackles of man-made traditions, they ended up with shackles that were created by the spirit of denominational mindsets. Many ended up marring the unity of the Spirit by their practice of “denominating” themselves, breaking up the body of Christ according to non-essential doctrines, or according to particular practices, or according to some other basis. In other words, for many the first designation they used of themselves became more important than the second designation they used.

What I mean is this, generally speaking (as there are always exceptions), if a Lutheran Christian (“Lutheran” being the first designation used and “Christian” being the second designation used) wanted to become a member in a Baptist Church, the Lutheran Christian had to become a Baptist Christian, accepting their understanding of certain texts of Scripture. Or if a Methodist Christian wanted membership in a Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Christian had to become Presbyterian Christian, and the examples could go on and on.

Beloved, membership in a local Church is simply a reflection of membership in the universal Church. If one is a member in the universal Church (being a member of the Body of Christ) they already are a member of any true local Church! How could it be otherwise? The only prerequisite of membership in the universal Church is life, i.e. being born again, being baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ! As such, the requirement for being a member of a local Church can be no less! Every believer by their virtue of being in the body of Christ (universal) is already a member of every local Church or body of Christ (locally expressed). Life, not acceptance of non-essential doctrines, or certain practices is the true basis of membership. Acceptance of non-essential doctrines comes later, and is the result of sanctification of the Spirit (assuming that Church’s interpretations of those non-essential doctrines are correct). In other words, a differing view of Church government does not prohibit one from being accepted by Christ as a member of His Church. Faith in Christ is the only requirement. The Holy Spirit immediately baptizes into one body, the person who exercises faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, thus making Him a member of the Church! Or conversely, one who holds to baptism by sprinkling, but believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, immediately is baptized into the body of Christ and so is accepted by Christ as a member of His Church, despite his or her continual belief in baptism by sprinkling. If Christ accepts Him into membership, should he or she be prohibited to become a member of a local Church? Indeed, he or she should not for they are already a member of every local Church which is a true Church because they are a member of the universal Church.

And so, the centuries continued, with Churches making progress in manifesting the unity of the Spirit, but not fully, for denominational mindsets were a hindrance, that is until the early nineteenth century, when a group of Christians in Dublin (and then later in Plymouth), came to understand the failures brought about by denominational mindsets. As such, they tried to manifest the unity of the Spirit by breaking through

every denominational barrier. They did this not by forming a new denomination, for they refused every attempt by other Christians to label them as Plymouth Brethren, refusing to take that name or any other name assigned to them by other Christians (as was also first done by those now called Baptists). They did it by gathering only in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, around His Table, resting upon nothing but God's Word, and by welcoming every true believer into their midst, considering every true Christian to already be a member of their Assembly.

Of course, as with all the other examples we have provided throughout Church History, there were varying degrees of success and failure with them also. But their attempt was a noble attempt, and was most certainly pleasing to God, since it was in accordance with the Word of God, and, at first, full of forbearance and love for every child of God, regardless of their denominational interpretations of Scripture. In other words, it mattered not what denomination one might still be a part of—anyone who might still consider themselves a Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, or one of the many other denominations were all equally received, being already considered members of the local Assembly, if, indeed, they were already members of the universal Church, the body of Christ (which meant they must be truly born again).

One of the first brothers, in that brethren movement, seeking to manifest and maintain this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, was a brother by the name of Anthony Norris Groves. Below is an example of his desire and mindset during that time in Church History.

“I always understood our principle of fellowship to be this—the possession of the common life, found in the common cleansing of the blood of Christ (for the life is in the blood); these were our early thoughts, these were our first principles, and they still are to me. I have not abandoned them as I have matured in my Christian life...Back at the beginning, we were all concerned about how we, ourselves, might effectively manifest forth the common life we had received from Jesus, knowing that only his life could speak and minister to those who shared that same life. And when we found that life in others, and when we were persuaded it was genuine, we invited them, on the basis of that Divine life, to come and share with us in the fellowship of the common Spirit—all in order to worship our common head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And, since Christ had received them, we also received them to the glory of God the Father (whether their thoughts on other matters of the Church were narrow or enlarged). And not only that, we ourselves were free, within the limits of the truth, to fellowship with them in *part*, even though we knew we could never do so in *all*—we knew we could not share or fellowship with them in all their ways or services. In fact, as we *received* them for their possession of that common life of Jesus, we never

rejected them because of any denominational association, nor did we ever refuse to recognize certain *parts* of their religious system, simply because we disallowed *much* within that same religious system.”³

And in another place he said this.

“However, the moment we abandon this principle of receiving all who Christ receives because of our possession of the common life of Jesus, and, rather, adopt a position of separating ourselves from other brethren, with a mindset that “only” preaches against their errors with words, (that is errors or doctrines that have nothing to do with the essential doctrines of the Faith), then, at that moment, every Christian, or every group of Christians will become suspect. The first thought in our mind will become, “What needs to be set straight in our brother’s life, or, what false interpretation needs to be corrected.” No longer will it be enough to examine whether or not they are Christians, rather a standard will be set up where all their conduct and principles will first have to be examined and approved before they can be received. This mindset will inevitably lead to the most bigoted and narrow-minded in our midst becoming the judges of all. Why? Because it’s not in the nature of a bigoted and narrow-minded conscience to yield. Thus, those among us with an open and enlarged heart will find themselves forced to yield to the strictures of such narrow-minded consciences... but in all this I would INFINITELY RATHER BEAR *with all their errors*, than be required to SEPARATE from THEIR GOOD!

Did you know, dear brother, that some will not have me hold communion with the Scotts, because their views are not satisfactory about the Lord’s Supper? Others will not have me hold communion with you, because of your views about baptism! And others will not have me join in fellowship with those from the Church of England, because of her thoughts about ministry. But based upon my principles of communion, I receive them all; but based upon your principle of witnessing against error, I must reject them all (including you!).”⁴

But over time, as with other attempts throughout Church History, this noble attempt began to falter among those early brethren in the nineteenth century. Certain ones, some even from those first early meetings in Dublin, began to change these original principles of gathering and unity. Below is an excerpt from a letter that was written by Anthony Norris Groves to one such Christian who was leaving those original principles, as well as another excerpt from his memoirs.

³ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 10-11

⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 49

And even though I feel you have departed from our original principles, (which I know you had hoped would allow our original purposes to be realized), and, though I fear you might be in danger of returning back to the narrow mindset of the religious system you left, I still feel your heart remains committed before God to our very first principles; and, with but a simple reminder or two, I feel your heart will be able to see all the evils ⁵ of all the systems (from which you profess to be separated), actually springing up among yourselves...Moreover, when that lack of pity and sympathy is coupled together with the growing conviction within your midst, that fellowship, or union together, is based upon one's agreement in doctrine and opinion, rather than being based upon life and love, you will find yourself once again in a system governed by human authority and man-made opinion (even though that will never be admitted). You will be known more by what you witness against, than what you witness for; and in the end, you will find yourself witnessing against everyone else but yourself. ⁶

Toward this position or mindset, dear D__, I feel some little flocks are racing, if they have not already attained it. They make *light* not *life* the measure of communion or reception. And if that was not enough, I am told by our beloved brethren...that if I do not accept this narrow-minded standard of witnessing against error, if I do not follow this peculiar way of separating myself from other Christians or systems where such evil might be present, I will be accused of unpardonable schism. And why is this so? Simply because I might join in fellowship with other systems or bodies? ⁷

⁵ It should be noted that in this time period, "evil," as used in the original letter to Darby, did not just refer to the moral sins of the flesh, such as drunkenness, adultery, etc. It also referred to those hidden sins and moral failures of the soul that one will always find when man-made traditions are introduced into the Church. It referred to such hidden sins and moral failures as **pride**, envy, narrow sectarian spirits, clerical mindsets that lorded over the saints, and even certain non-essential doctrines thought to be in **error**. And so, when it was used by A. N. Groves, it was not necessarily referring to moral sins or apostasy from the Faith requiring excommunication. **A. N. Groves and the early brethren would never condone any evil doctrine or evil having to do with outward sins of the flesh—all for the sake of unity.** In fact, in his journal brother Groves states a true Christian should never remain under the ministry of one who is a perverter of truth; rather, such a one should leave. And so, since the word evil today it is often reserved for moral sins or heresy, and in order to prevent any misunderstanding, I have changed the word "evil" to "error" in some places in his letter, although I have left it as evil in a few places.

⁶ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 5,6,7

⁷ Ibid., pg. 12

“Yet as to our liberty in Christ to worship with any congregation under heaven where He manifests himself to bless and to save, can there be in any Christian mind a doubt? If my Lord should say to me, in any congregation of the almost unnumbered sections of the Church, “What dost thou here?” I would reply, “Seeing Thou wert here to save and sanctify, I felt it safe to be with Thee.” If He again said, as perhaps He may among most of us, “Didst thou not see abominations here, an admixture of that which was unscriptural, and the absence of that which was scriptural, and in some points error, at least in your judgment?” my answer would be, “Yea, Lord, but I dared not call that place unholy where Thou wert present to bless, nor by refusing communion in worship reject those as unholy whom Thou hadst by Thy saving power evidently sanctified and set apart for Thine own.”⁸

Now, no doubt, it is true, a violation of one of these two cardinal points will end up dividing me *in some measure* from every man-made religious system. Why? Because with the former, a person will demand me to do something the Lord does not require me to do, and with the latter, a person will prevent me from doing what I feel the Lord commands me to do. But the important point to remember in all of this is that which divides me is not my witnessing against THEIR evils, but my *obedience* or *own proper* duty to God. Every man-made traditional system will always, by definition, be narrower or wider than the truth of God’s Word, so I will always have to stop short or go beyond its requirements, but in all this I would INFINITELY RATHER BEAR *with all their errors*, than be required to SEPARATE from THEIR GOOD! ⁹

The Christian brother that Anthony Norris Groves was addressing was J. N. Darby, who was also one of the very first brothers attempting to break through the many denominational mindsets that were hindering to manifestation of the unity of the Spirit during the first part of the 19th century. His too was a noble attempt, but he soon departed from the original principles in this endeavor and slowly over time began to become narrow and rigid in his thinking, substituting a different principle for manifesting of the unity of the Spirit, i.e. his concept of separation from evil as a basis for unity.

And so, since those brethren of the early 19th century (who were labeled the Plymouth Brethren by other Christians) were so focused on maintaining the unity of the Spirit, and since they attempted to manifest that oneness through the abandonment of any denominational

⁸ A. N. Groves, *Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves: containing extracts from his letters and journals* 2nd edition, (James Nisbet, London, 1857) pg. 535

⁹ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 13

nomenclature or mindset (perhaps to a greater degree than any other group of Christians in modern times), and since their efforts soon faltered and ultimately failed, leading into one division after another, with each new division claiming to be the one true expression of Christ's oneness upon earth, we will use them as an example of how such a noble desire can so utterly fail.

But equally, we will also use them as an example as to how such a noble desire can, and, indeed, did succeed, in many cases, as long as certain biblical parameters were followed and maintained. Perhaps, by using them as an example it will benefit any group of Christians today, who still seek to fulfill our Saviour's desire that all His children love each other and manifest His oneness to a dying world.

And so it is to that we would now like to turn our attention as we continue to consider the problem of manifesting the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We will first examine the reasons for their failure to maintain the unity of the Spirit by looking to those issues A. N. Groves raised with J. N. Darby in the letter mentioned above, beginning with Darby's theory of "separation from evil" as being a basis for the unity of the Spirit. But first we will examine the separation from evil that is incumbent upon every Christian, and then we will examine how our brother misapplied it to the unity of the Spirit.

Separation from Evil in Scripture

The phrase “separation from evil” is not found in Scripture, but its principle certainly is. It is rooted in the biblical principle of sanctification. Once a person is saved, they are set apart or sanctified by the Spirit of God.

II Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. KJV

They are sanctified or “separated from evil,” i.e. from sin and death, by their new birth, by their being born of the Spirit; moreover, they are set apart by the great salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus, who becomes to us not only our righteousness, but also our sanctification, i.e. our set apartness, our separation.

I Corinthians 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. KJV

This is all done for us, by God when He saves us. It is all of God, and nothing of ourselves. In other words, He does the separation at the moment of salvation, when we simply believe and so are delivered by Him from sin and death.

But this sanctification or separation continues; Scripture also speaks of a present aspect of our sanctification or separation (as well as a future aspect of sanctification or separation). First, it speaks of our consecration to God and our sanctification from the world and all that is in the world.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. KJV

I John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. KJV

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. NKJV

This is the first step in the present aspect of our sanctification that every Christian is admonished to take. We have been separated from sin and death in our new birth and we must be separated from the world in our new life or Christian walk. But this walk is a process. One step should lead to another, until we learn to walk correctly, just like we learned when we were babies.

Consequently, when a born again Christian begins to walk by the Spirit, that which has been done by the Spirit in new birth, will then be manifested on earth in their walk, little by little. Thus our sanctification in the present is continuous. As the Holy Spirit fills us, we are more and more separated from the “evil of the world” and separated from the “evil of self” that which still resides in us, that is sometimes manifested in the life of a carnal Christian. Paul calls this manifestation of sin or evil, the works of the flesh, which includes those evil things that are done, not just in the body, but also in the soul or self.

Galatians 5:19-26 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strifes, jealousies, angers, contentions, disputes, schools of opinion,²¹ envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revels, and things like these; as to which I tell you beforehand, even as I also have said before, that they who do such things shall not inherit God's kingdom.²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity,²³ meekness, self-control: against such things there is no law.²⁴ But they that *are* of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us walk also by the Spirit²⁶ Let us not become vain-glorious, provoking one another, envying one another. Darby's Version

As such, Paul teaches us to pray for our daily separation from all such evil things, whether it be from the world or from that which still is within ourselves, and which, unfortunately, many times, we will think does not exist in us. But Scripture clearly says that if a Christian says that sin is not still present in the believer, that Christian is deceived and knows not the full truth of the depths of our fallen Adamic nature, or the wonderful heights of what we have been given in Christ.

I John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Therefore, we should all be careful not to think that once we have consecrated ourselves to God, neither loving the world, nor conforming

ourselves to the world, we have now arrived and are now spiritual Christians. We should be careful not to think that our sanctification from such outward things now insures that we are no longer a carnal Christian. We should be careful not to think we are so pleasing to God, having abandoned the obvious and outward sins or evil of the body, such as fornication, idolatry, adultery and drunkenness that we forget or are totally oblivious to the fact that those evil sins of the soul, such as pride, jealousies, anger, hatred, divisiveness, envyings, selfishness, etc. may still be present within us. These too are the hidden things of evil from which a growing Christian also needs to be sanctified from, to be separated from. We should not forget, as James tells us, one sin is the same as the other in regard to evil, and both equally condemn us, if not for the blood of Christ.

Jesus also speaks of this hidden evil in our heart, which others may never see, but which God certainly sees.

Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: ²³ All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. KJV

What all this means is that during this present dispensation of grace, no Christian can say they truly are completely separated from evil, and if a Christian thinks they are, it proves they are not! Because of this, the daily prayer of the Christian should be the same prayer of the apostle Paul found in his epistle to the Thessalonians.

I Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

As Christians, we have been sanctified in new birth, but we are also being sanctified in our new walk. In one sense, one could say we have been sanctified in our spirit (being born again); we are being sanctified in our soul (being transformed by the renewing of our mind); and we will be sanctified in our body (when we are changed into His likeness in glorification).

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. KJV

W. E. Vine nicely lists all these different aspects of our sanctification or separation from evil in his classic work, *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*.

“HAGIASMOS (ἁγιασμός)... Sanctification is also used in NT of the separation of the believer from evil things and ways. This sanctification is God's will for the believer, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, and His purpose in calling him by the gospel, 1 Thessalonians 4:7; it must be learned from God, 1 Thessalonians 4:4, as He teaches it by His Word, John 17:17, 19; cp. Psalm 17:4; 119:9, and it must be pursued by the believer, earnestly and undeviatingly, 1 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 12:14. For the holy character, *hagiosune*, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, is not vicarious, i.e., it cannot be transferred or imputed, **it is an individual possession, built up, little by little, as the result of obedience to the Word of God, and of following the example of Christ**, Matthew 11:29; John 13:15; Ephesians 4:20; Philippians 2:5, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Romans 8:13; Ephesians 3:16...The Holy Spirit is the Agent in sanctification, Romans 15:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; cp. 1 Corinthians 6:11. ... The sanctification of the Spirit is associated with the choice, or election, of God; it is a Divine act preceding the acceptance of the Gospel by the individual.”¹⁰

Thus, the most important thing to realize in all this is that a Christian's separation from evil is important to God, yet it is a lifelong endeavour that is done by the discipline, power and filling of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be done in our own strength but only by the power of God that transforms us from glory to glory.

II Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. NASB

In one sense, it follows the example left for us in the Old Testament where God defeated the nations in the land of Canaan for Joshua and the children of Israel (Joshua 11: 16-22). The children of Israel had been “separated” from slavery in Egypt, and then, after a time of trial in the wilderness, they were now gaining many victories in Canaan. But Joshua tells them that even though many victories had been won against the evil of the Canaanites, there was still much evil to be expunged in the land (Joshua 13: 1-14).

¹⁰ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. III, pg. 317-318

This did not mean that the promises of God failed. Indeed, Joshua reminds the children of Israel that not even one promise of God ever failed.

Joshua 21:43-45 So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. ⁴⁴ And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵ Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.

But it shows that separation (like our present sanctification) is a process that occurs little by little just as it did in Israel. Just as the land was not sanctified all at one time, some evil still remained, so too, our present sanctification is not all at one time, some evil still remains to be faithfully dealt with by the believer as he or she obeys the Spirit. In fact, God told the children of Israel it was to be this way—little by little.

Exodus 23:29 I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate, and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. ³⁰ I will drive them out before you **little by little**, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land. NASB

Thus we see that “separation” from evil is a lifelong endeavour for the Christian. It is the present aspect of our sanctification during which time God deals with the evil remaining in our fallen flesh, in our old man (much like He dealt with the evil of the Canaanites left in the land) until we become more and more filled with the fruit of the Spirit and so overcome any remaining sin or evil in our soul. Positionally, the old man has been crucified, left dead and buried, symbolically, in our baptism; but, subjectively, it must be reckoned dead by the Christian every day as we follow the Lord.

Romans 7:21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. KJV

Romans 6:11-12 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. KJV

So we see the will of God is our continuing sanctification or separation from evil, little by little, as God the Holy Spirit makes it known to us in our life. We must never forget, as long as we live on this earth, there will always be some sins, which are obvious and can so be put aside

immediately, but there will also always be other sins or evil, the hidden sins of self, spiritual pride, lack of faith in the promises of God, or such sins as trusting in human strength and creativity to do the work of the Lord. All these over time must be searched out by the light of God and the light of the Word in our prayers and so be put aside.

The prayer of David should be the daily prayer of every Christian.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: ²⁴ **And see if *there be any wicked way in me***, and lead me in the way everlasting. KJV

And so every Christian must be ready to put away any evil in their heart that is brought to light by God the Holy Spirit. And it must be done with complete humility and utter dependence upon God, for we can never do such a thing in our own strength, for indeed, when it comes to the hidden sins of self, we do not even know of that evil apart from the convicting power and light of the Holy Spirit of God in accordance with the light of the Word. Such are the subtleties of self and sin.

One Christian once said—

“The two great pillars upon which true Scriptural Christianity rests are the greatness of our fall and the greatness of our redemption...Nothing is easier than self-deception; few things are so difficult as real self-disclosure. We may be claiming and even professing the experience of holiness, and yet know nothing of a total death to the carnal or natural life.” ¹¹

Then another place he writes—

“For obvious reasons no branch of knowledge is so neglected as knowledge of ourselves. In other sciences, knowledge flatters the vanity of the unsanctified heart...But true self-discovery wounds our pride, and spoils the good opinion we had formed and cherished of ourselves. We may be skilled in every other science and ignorant in this....Self-love conspires with trust in our own hearts to make dupes of us as regards our spiritual account. Proverbially, and in the verdict of all experience, love is blind; and if love be blind, self-love being the strongest, the most subtle, the most changeless, the most difficult to eradicate of all loves, is blinder still. Self-love will not see, as self-trust cannot see, anything against us...What is necessary then, since self-love will cause us to live in such a fool's paradise ... is the searchlight of God...Painful and humiliating as the

¹¹ J. Gregory Mantle, *Beyond Humiliation, The Way of the Cross*, (Moody Press, Chicago, IL) Pg.28-29

searching and exposure may be, the very beginning of a life that is all for God hinges upon our being absolutely honest with Him about our present spiritual condition.”¹²

This is God’s principle of sanctification in our present walk, His principle of our “separation from evil.” It can never be done by ourselves, for when it is, as was said above, it inevitably leads to “a mixture of good and bad,” for “our humility will help our pride, our charity or love to others will give nourishment to our own self-love, and as our prayers increase so will the opinion of our own sanctity.”

And, then, of course, in the end, our final separation from evil will occur, on that day when we are glorified—when this corruption will put on incorruption! That will be our true and final separation from evil! Oh, that wondrous day, and Oh the wonders of His grace!

I Corinthians 15:42-43, 49 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: ⁴³ It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: ⁴⁹ And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. ⁵⁰ Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹ Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? ⁵⁶ The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

¹² Ibid. pg. 26-28

J. N. Darby's Misapplication of Separation from Evil

As we discussed before, since the brethren of the early 19th century (who were labeled the Plymouth Brethren by other Christians) were so focused on maintaining the unity of the Spirit, and since they attempted to manifest that oneness through the abandonment of any denominational nomenclature or mindset (perhaps to a greater degree than any other group of Christians in modern times), we are using them as an example of how such a noble desire can so wonderfully succeed, as long as certain biblical parameters are followed and maintained, but also as an example of how such a noble desire can so utterly fail.

Unfortunately, for our brother Darby, and those who followed him, their noble attempt for oneness soon faltered and ultimately failed, leading into one division after another, with each new division claiming to be the one true expression of Christ's oneness upon earth, and one true expression of His Church.

The simple fact is this. Our brother Darby slowly departed from the original principles of the brethren and slowly began to become narrower and narrower in his thinking, substituting a different principle for manifesting of the unity of the Spirit, i.e. his concept of separation from evil as a basis for unity. But, we should also state, he did so with no malice aforethought, but with a sincere desire to communicate truth. But the fact remains, his new theory led to one division after another.

As such, I must admit it was an unfortunate day in Church history, when a few believers, along with our brother Darby, took the sacred principle of separation from evil through the sanctification of the Spirit, and turned it into the principle upon which they believed the unity of the Spirit was based and could be maintained. He took the unity of the Spirit out of the hands of the Lord and His Word, and placed it into the hands of imperfect men (who were still in need of much sanctification and separation from evil themselves), which, in reality meant that if separation from evil was the only way the unity of the Spirit could be manifested, then as long as they themselves remained in an Assembly, with all the evil still present within their own souls, and with all the imperfection within them still in need of sanctification, then their desired goal would always escape them. That is why God never made separation from evil to be the basis of the unity of the Spirit, for if it was the real

basis of unity then there could never be any unity of the Spirit manifested while the Church still sojourning upon this earth in this dispensation.

In one sense, one could say that those who established “separation from evil” as a principle for God’s unity did have a zeal for God, but it was not according to knowledge, for they did not truly understand the true nature of God’s unity and the true nature of the Blessed Trinity, for if they did, they never would have substituted another principle of unity within the Godhead, and so within the Church. So with that, let us begin to examine his thoughts in regard to this matter.

Darby once wrote—

Here I might close my remarks, having developed the great, though simple, principle, **flowing from the very nature of God, that separation from evil is His principle of unity**.

In this quote, by applying his theory to God’s nature, our brother Darby totally misunderstood the true nature of the Godhead by believing that God’s “unity” was rooted in separation from evil.

Beloved, separation from evil has never been the principle of God’s unity! Why?—because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are eternal and were one, dwelling in perfect “unity,” before evil ever existed! So how could it ever be the “basis” for their unity?

God has never had anything to do with evil, and to teach that His unity was based upon His separation from evil, in one sense, could be called an evil in and of itself for it bears false witness against the true nature of the Blessed Trinity. And that is what is so ironic. Our brother rebuked other brethren for what he perceived as evil in them, and yet he did not see the evil in himself and what he declared! It was simply wrong for brother Darby to make this assertion about the Godhead, as we will now begin to show by God’s grace and by God’s truth as revealed in Scripture, after first providing a few more quotes of his regarding the unity of the Spirit

Our brother Darby also said this:

“If the name of unity then be so powerful in itself, and in virtue of blessings withal which God Himself has attached to it, it behoves us well to understand what the unity He owns really is...The world is lying in wickedness, and the God of unity is the Holy God. **Separation therefore, separation from evil, becomes the necessary and sole basis and principle, I do not say the power,**

of unity. For God must be the centre and power of that unity, and evil exists; and from that corruption they must be separate who are to be in God's unity; for He can have no union with evil. **Hence, I repeat, we have this great fundamental principle, that separation from evil is the basis of all true unity.** Without this, it is more or less attaching God's authority to evil, and rebellion against His authority; as is all unity independent of Him.¹³

He based this idea upon his view of the nature of our Holy God in conjunction with II Cor. 6:17, as we will now show in further declarations of his.

II Corinthians 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, KJV

Here begins the mistake and the departure of J. N. Darby from the original principles embraced by the other brethren he first met with in Dublin, regarding the true principle of the Spirit's unity.

In commenting on this verse he says this in another place,

“This was God's way of gathering. It was by saying, ‘Come out from among them.’ He could not have gathered true unity around Him otherwise. Since evil exists, yea, is our natural condition, there cannot be union of which the holy God is the center and power but by separation from it. Separation is the first element of unity and union. So, again, one with the other. What fellowship hath light with darkness? Christ with Belial? What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? And then, addressing the saints, the Holy Ghost adds, ‘For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate.’”¹⁴

He then continues and applies this principle to any Assembly (that in his judgment) was countenancing evil and so was not abiding in separation. He states—

“Here I might close my remarks, having developed the great, though simple, principle, **flowing from the very nature of God, that separation from evil is His principle of unity.** But a difficulty collateral to my main object and subject presents itself. Supposing evil introduces itself into this one body so formed actually on earth, does the principle still hold good? How then can separation

¹³ J. N. D., *Separation from Evil, the Principle, and Grace the Power of Unity* (W. B. Horner, Manchester, c. 1878) Pg. 6, 9

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 11, 16

from evil maintain unity? And here we can touch on the mystery of iniquity. **But this principle, flowing from the very nature of God, that He is holy, cannot be set aside. Separation from evil is the necessary consequence of the presence of the Spirit of God under all circumstances** as to conduct and fellowship. **But here there is a certain modification of it.”**¹⁵

So with these two quotes on this subject, let us now examine his thinking a little closer.

First, our brother eloquently discusses the fact that light cannot have fellowship with darkness, nor can righteousness have fellowship with unrighteousness, which he then uses as a basis to separate from any Assembly, which in his view has allowed evil to be introduced in their midst. But then, what is so amazing is that after he ties it into God’s nature, which, of course is eternal, he then allows exception! He says at the end of the quote above, “But here there is a certain modification of it.”

Dear brethren, how can there ever be a modification of God’s nature, as it is eternal and immutable!? The answer is there cannot be! If one claims that separation from evil is the basis of all unity, being rooted in the very nature of God, but then one states that there is a certain modification of it, then one is declaring that God does not always act in perfect accordance with His nature! May God forgive such a thought! And this in itself shows our brother’s theory is incorrect, and in a real sense, if we were to follow the same standard for judging evil that our brother Darby followed, we would have to judge that he, himself, and any who agreed with him were they, themselves, introducing the leaven of evil into an Assembly, for a declaration that there is a “certain modification” of something rooted in the very nature of God is, in reality, bearing false witness against the very character and nature of God; God will never modify anything that is rooted in His very nature, for God is immutable! (Of course, how wonderful is the grace of God and blood of Christ that forgave our brother Darby, and will forgive us and anyone else who might equally be guilty of inadvertently saying something wrong in regard to the nature of God. We are all sinners saved by grace, which is why we should all be circumspect in ever pointing out the motes in our brother’s eye, if we do not recognize the beams that exist in our own eyes! I do not believe our brother was maliciously bearing false witness against God, but his statement was nevertheless false. But neither do I

¹⁵ Ibid., pg. 17-18

believe those he endlessly judged were maliciously bearing false witness against the nature of God and so should never have been mercilessly judged by him, as he, and those with him, did. They did not understand their own shortcomings, which means they were not acting righteously in their judgment, for judgment, if made, must be equally applied to all, and they never applied the same standard of judgment to themselves—cf. Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:18-19; John 7:24.)

The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit do not dwell in unity because they have each separated from evil. They dwell in unity because *they possess the one and same Divine substance*. And that is a completely different basis for unity than that which was espoused by our brother Darby. When applied to the nature of God, separation from evil can never be the basis of God's unity, for that would demand the eternal existence of evil from which to be separated from! They dwelt in perfect unity long before (if I might use that phraseology) evil ever existed, so obviously, it never was a principle of their unity, for that which unifies them in eternity, is no different than that which unifies them now in time, and that which unifies them unto everlasting ages—consubstantiality and coinherence! God does not change. He is perfect in every way!

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in perfect oneness and unity from all eternity. They are one within each other through their perfect and eternal coinherence, which is based upon their co-equal and eternal possession of the same and undivided Substance of the Godhead, which, in turn is expressed by a perfect and eternal communion of selflessness and love between all Three Persons. Their unity is not derived from without—by an outward act of separation. But their unity is derived from within—by an inward act of eternal communion and possession of the one and same Substance. It is not an outward act of separation from evil that manifests their unity, but it is an inward act of love that manifests their unity.

Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! NKJV

John 10:30 I and *my* Father are one. KJV

John 1:1-2 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. KJV

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. KJV

Deuteronomy 32:4 *He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.* NKJV

Malachi 3:6 “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. NASB

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. KJV

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. KJV

Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped NASB

When one speaks of the nature of God, one by definition is speaking of an eternal nature. So, to say that separation from evil is the basis for God’s unity is to say the Divine Substance of God is mutable for it must react to something external from itself in order to become “the principle of His unity!” That thought is impossible! That never has been a part of the Historic Christian Faith.

Not only that, it would also bring uncertainty to our eternal security, for if God’s substance is mutable, it means His attributes are mutable, since attributes are nothing more than characterization of substance; so if a change of Divine substance can occur, one must admit a change of attributes can occur, and if a change of attributes can occur, who is to say they could not change in the future?

No, no, no, beloved. The real reason why the Blessed Trinity dwells in unity is because the Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial with God the Father. Moreover, the one Divine substance of the Godhead is immutable, the same, and perfect in every way! That is the basis of the unity of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, and not, as our brother Darby asserts, their separation from evil. That simply is a false statement he made concerning the nature of God’s unity. And since all Truth is rooted in God, if one’s first presupposition regarding God’s unity is false, then one’s subsequent supposition, based upon the first, will in all likelihood be false.

The proof of this, as we already mentioned, is that evil is not eternal and so separation from it could never be the basis for God’s unity, for God is, indeed, eternal. If separation from evil was a necessary ingredient for unity, then again we must ask as to how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

eternally existed in unity? The Blessed Trinity was eternal, which means the nature of the Godhead, of course, was eternal, which means, of course, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit were eternal, and which means their UNITY was eternal—but evil was not eternal! It began with the fall of Lucifer and was introduced into the world by Adam (see Isa. 14:12-13; Eze. 28:13-17; Rom. 5:12-14).

This fact alone shows us that our brother Darby was basing the unity of the Spirit (and so our unity together as the Church) on the wrong foundation and principle! The Blessed Trinity dwelt in perfect oneness, unity and communion before all creation because of consubstantiality and coinherence—before evil ever existed!

And so this explains why our brother Darby was incorrect, for if separation from evil flowed “from the very nature of God” and was the very principle of His unity (and so was the principle of our unity), there never, NEVER could be a *modification of it* as he suggested did occur. It would remain inviolate, for God can never countenance evil in any way; that can never be modified in any way.

Secondly, when looking at this passage he references in II Cor. 6:14-17, we can also see that our brother Darby was taking the verse out of context. He ignores the overall context of the chapter and the entire epistle. This verse is speaking of the separation of believers from unbelievers, but Darby takes this Scripture and applies it of separation of “believers” from “believers.” But that is not what Paul says. In fact, within this passage, Paul specifically states he is referring to believers with unbelievers.

II Corinthians 6:14-15 Do not be unequally yoked together **with unbelievers**. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or **what part has a believer with an unbeliever?** NKJV

And yet some still manage to ignore this clear application to unbelievers, by broadening the interpretation of another verse. They do it in this way. Paul’s admonition to not be unequally yoked together in verse 14, most likely refers to the Old Testament verse in Deut. 22:10.

Deuteronomy 22:10 “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. NASB

This verse, of course, references two different species of animals, the ox and the donkey. This fits in nicely with Paul's analogy, for spiritually speaking, one could say that a believer and an unbeliever are two different species, so to speak, since a believer is called a new creation (II Cor. 5:17). But, of course, this obvious comparison is ignored by those who apply them both to believers, simply because they state that since the firstborn of a donkey is redeemed with a lamb, the donkey must refer to someone who is redeemed, i.e. a believer.

Exodus 13:13 "But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. NKJV

But as with all twisting of Scripture that is made to force fit into a preconceived idea, the fallacy of it can be readily seen. First, if the donkey represented a believer, how could the two still be unequally yoked? Are not all Christians equal and one in Christ, there not being male or female, bond or free, Jew or Gentile (Gal.3:28)? Are we not equal before God because we stand before Him with the imputed righteousness of Christ? So what would make the two unequal? In our standing and acceptance before God, does one Christian have more righteousness than another Christian? God forbid! We are all one in Christ Jesus equally accepted by God our Father because of the blood and righteousness of His Beloved Son in whom we believe. So how can two Christians be unequally yoked?

Now, of course, they would have to say, "Well what makes them unequal is one of believers is not "separated from evil" and the other one is "separated from evil." But if that is true, then Paul would have said something like, "Do not be unequally yoked together **with carnal Christians,**" or, "Do not be unequally yoked together **with Christians who remain in sin,**" or, "Do not be unequally yoked together **with Christians who do not separate from evil.**" If that is what Paul really said, then who could argue? But that is not what Paul said. He said, "Do not be unequally yoked together **with unbelievers.**" He was very clear in his application and comparison; he says with unbelievers, so why do some try to say he did not mean unbelievers? Therefore, this verse cannot be used for separating from other believers as our brother Darby intimates and others affirm.

Now, perhaps, some will admit it is a stretch to claim that those with whom Paul says not to be unequally yoked are believers. In other words, they will admit Paul is referring to believers with unbelievers.

Consequently, they say the comparison to believers does not occur in verse 14, but in verse 15 because Paul uses the example of Belial (Beliar)

II Corinthians 6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? NASB

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were warned that if anyone enticed others to go after other gods, they were considered to be children of Belial.

Deuteronomy 13:13 *Certain* men, the **children of Belial**, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known. KJV

Now, they are on a little firmer ground than those who claim the donkey in Paul's comparison referred to a believer. Belial was indeed, used of those who may have been redeemed, but then who departed from God. But those who believe this is so must also admit and cannot deny that the name Belial was also used of unbelievers, ones who were never saved, ones who never knew God. For example, it is used this way in I Sam. 2:27.

I Samuel 2:12 Now the sons of Eli *were* **sons of Belial**; they **knew not the LORD**. KJV

And so, one cannot say that Belial always refers to those who are redeemed, but are not separated from evil; it also refers to unbelievers. So the question must be asked as to how Paul was using Belial in the context. Was he using it of believers, as used in Deut. 13:13, or was he using it of unbelievers, as it was used in I Sam. 2:12?

To answer that question one must look to the context of the chapter and to the context of his epistle (including his first correspondence with the Corinthians) and then, indeed, to the overall context of the New Testament, supplemented by the historical context of that time. And when we do that the answer becomes crystal clear if we are disciplined in our hermeneutics and in our objectivity.

When we look to the immediate context of the chapter we see that Paul uses it as a title and/or a name of an individual. He makes a comparison between Christ and this one named Belial. Christ, of course, is the head of the body of Christ that is composed of believers. He is our God and Saviour.

Ephesians 1:22 And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,²³ Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. KJV

And so, in contrast to Christ, Belial would also refer to an individual and not a group of Christians. So in the greater context, who would that individual be? More than likely Paul was continuing his thought from chapter 4. Belial, in that case, who is contrasted with Christ, would be the god of this world who also has his followers, whether they know they are following him or not, since they dwell in darkness and are blind.

II Corinthians 4:3-4 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:⁴ In whom **the god of this world** hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. KJV

So, we see that Paul would be referring to Christ and Belial as representing the heads of two bodies—believers and unbelievers (in the KJV—infidels). This is also confirmed within the historical understanding of the time, because when Paul wrote this epistle, Belial, also spelled Beliar, was used as a name for Satan. In the Jewish Book of Jubilees, the name was so applied.

“Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be lifted up upon Thy people, and create in them an upright spirit, and let not the spirit of **Beliar** rule over them to accuse them before Thee, and to ensnare them from all the paths of righteousness, so that they may perish from before Thy face” (Jubilees 1:20).¹⁶

One of the first rules of hermeneutics is to take into account in our interpretations the meaning of words within their historical context. As such, the use of Belial as a name for Satan cannot be ignored. Besides, Paul does not say “what concord hath Christ with the children of Belial” (as used in Deut. 13:13), but, “what concord hath Christ with Belial?” Paul is using it as a name of an individual, not a group of believers or children who have been defiled by evil. He is referring to the one individual who parallels Christ as being the representative head of a class of people.

But even if this historical reference is ignored, Paul confirms it for us, himself, with his very next phrase in the verse! He completes his

¹⁶ Robert Henry Charles, ed., tr., *The Book of Jubilees* (Adam and Charles Black, London, 1902) pg. 6

comparison with the phrase, or “what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”

II Corinthians 6:15 Or what harmony has **Christ** with **Belial**, or what has a **believer** in common with an **unbeliever**? NASB

So once again, Paul interprets the verse for us; he is not comparing believers with believers who have not separated from evil, but he is comparing believers with unbelievers.

In fact, one of the most compelling reasons for this fact is that Paul specifically uses the underlying Greek word for “unbelievers” (ἄπιστου—inflected as a genitive) in II Cor. 6:15. As such, it cannot be used of a believer who has not separated from evil. And this brings us to the greater context of his epistle to the Corinthians.

If we look to the context of this epistle (and, indeed, his first epistle to the Corinthians) we see that every time Paul decides to use the Greek word ἄπιστος (unbeliever—substantively, and unbelieving—adjectivally) in either one of his epistles to the Corinthians, it refers to one who is lost, to one who does not know the Lord, to one who is unsaved, to an unbeliever. Paul never once used it of a believer who is apostate, or a believer who unfaithful, having fallen into sin.¹⁷ Let me

¹⁷ We should note that Jesus may have used it of a believer who lacks faith in the power of God to perform a miracle in Matt. 17:16-17, and in John 20:27, in the case of Thomas, of one not believing in the power of God to raise Christ from the dead. But it should also be noted that in both of these cases our Lord is using it as an adjective and not substantively as Paul does in II Cor. 6:14-15. In the majority of uses it is used consistently of the unsaved. This fact can be clearly seen in the distinction shown between this word used of the unsaved, and the word “believer” used for the saved, even for a believer who obviously is sinning by denying the faith. This distinction can be found in I Tim. 5:8, where the same Greek word is used by Paul in II Cor. 6:14-15, being translated “infidel.” If an unbeliever is an infidel, and the believer is compared to an “infidel,” obviously, the believer could not be that infidel, even though he was acting worse than an infidel or unbeliever. So in Paul’s mind ἄπιστος is never a believer, but always an unbeliever, one who is unsaved, an infidel. He never uses the word for believers. So to be honest we must acknowledge the word might have been used once by Matthew for the saved, and once by John, depending on how one wishes to interpret those verse reference above, but Paul never did use it for the saved or believers. And so, for one who is objective in their interpretations, such a one will be able to see that the context in which Paul is using the word, he is using it of the unsaved.

provide a few examples of Paul's usage of the word. The Greek word used (as inflected) will be put in bold type.

I Corinthians 6:6 But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the **unbelievers (ἄπιστων)**. KJV

I Corinthians 7:12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an **unbeliever (ἄπιστον)**, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. NASB

I Corinthians 10:27 If one of the **unbelievers (ἄπιστων)** invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience ' sake. NASB

I Corinthians 14:22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to **unbelievers (ἄπιστοις)**; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe. NASB

II Corinthians 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the **unbelieving (ἄπιστων)**, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. NASB

Consequently, when we look at the full context of this passage one cannot use this verse as a command from God to separate from other believers as our brother Darby was mistakenly using it as a basis for such separations. Paul is speaking about our needed separation from the world, from those who do not know Christ, i.e. unbelievers. As with verse 14, if Paul was making a comparison of believers, who are separated from evil and those who are not, he could have written something like, "Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common **with a carnal believer**," or, "Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common **with a believer remaining in sin**, etc." The fact of the matter, as with verse 14, Paul makes clear he is referring of our need to be separated, not from other believers, but from other unbelievers.

Thirdly, our brother Darby forgets that Scripture says that those Christians in Corinth were still joined to the Lord in their present unglorified state. Does that not constitute a unity with Christ?

I Corinthians 6:17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. KJV

But how can that be, in light of our brother Darby's viewpoint? God cannot abide sin, nor can he be tempted by evil (James 1:13). The Son is holy, without sin, and pure in every way, and the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Holiness. How can Christians, who are still liable to sin (evil) ever be joined to One as holy as He. Indeed, Scripture says that our Lord is **separate** from sinners, so how can any Christian, who still sins, who still is imperfect and not yet fully perfected, ever be joined to Him?

Hebrews 7:26 For such a high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, **separate from sinners**, and made higher than the heavens. KJV

In other words, how can that unity exist? Remember, according to our brother Darby, separation from evil is the basis of **all true unity**, and yet Scripture says very clearly that such Christians as those in Corinth are still joined to (i.e. in union with) the Lord. So, again how can that be? Anything less than perfection must be evil for God is perfect and cannot be tempted by evil in this or any dispensation, or ever abide evil, and yet, Scripture says we are still joined to the Lord, even though we are not yet glorified, even though we are still less than perfect (Phil. 3:12), even though, as the Holy Spirit declares in I John 1:8, 10, we are still liable to sin?

I John 1:8, 10 ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. KJV

If unity is dependent on "separation from evil," as brother Darby asserts, and sin is evil (cf. Rom. 7:17 & 19; 20&21), and Scripture says we are still joined to the Lord, and yet, Scripture also says that God cannot abide sin or evil, how, indeed, can someone, who still sins, be in a unity with the Lord?

There is not one Christian on earth who can say he never sins or does not still have evil within, just as John said above and as the Old Testament Scriptures affirm below.

Psalms 143:2 And do not enter into judgment with Thy servant, **For in Thy sight no man living is righteous.**

Proverbs 20:9 Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, **I am pure from my sin**"?

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good **and who never sins.**

And yet, in spite of that fact of our unrighteousness, our sin, and the evil dwelling within, we do not see God ever separating from a child of His with whom He has joined to the Lord Jesus. Yes, fellowship can be broken, but that is not the same as unity. Once we are joined to the Lord, no one can “separate” us from His love; no one can sever us from His body; no one can snatch us from His hand (see Rom. 8:26-39; John 10:28). But our brother Darby says that God, according to His Divine nature, must always separate from evil for **“that separation from evil is His principle of unity.”**¹⁸ So how can that be?

The answer, of course, is that our brother Darby was wrong. The fact is that there is different basis for our unity with God than separation from evil. And it is that basis that allows us to be joined to the Lord in unity and that allows us to dwell together in unity with each other, despite the fact that we all are still imperfect Christians, liable to sin, with evil still present within us. And that basis is none other than the imputed righteousness of Christ that was made available to us by the blood of Christ by which we are justified before God.

Romans 4:6-8, 11 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works. ⁷ *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.* ⁸ *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.* ¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: KJV

II Corinthians 5:19,21 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.²¹ For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. KJV

Romans 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. KJV

Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*. KJV

¹⁸ J. N. D., *Separation from Evil, the Principle, and Grace the Power of Unity* (W. B. Horner, Manchester, c. 1878) pg. 17-18

Colossians 1:20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. KJV

Our God is holy and God can never abide evil. Nor is it possible that He could ever be joined to one who is evil, unless the question of evil has been settled. And, God be praised, He did settle that question. The reason why we can be joined to the Lord, despite the presence of evil within us, is because of His blood. It is the basis for our justification before God, as it has cleansed us from all sin, past, present and future! The blood is the true basis of our unity (as we will see in a subsequent chapter) and not “separation from evil.” We are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, despite our continued imperfection, because we have the imputed righteousness of Christ having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb!

Thus, perhaps, we can now begin to see that the true basis of our unity is not separation from evil, but the cleansing blood of Christ! If we are joined to the Lord and made one, all because of the precious blood of Christ, we can also remain one with the brethren and/or Assemblies who may yet be carnal, who may still be struggling with certain sins, which our brother labels evil, but which does not fall under the category of sins requiring excommunications.

Beloved, our brother Darby most certainly knew this. In fact, this truth was the principle of unity that was practiced by those first brethren when they first began to gather around the Lord’s Table in Dublin. But our brother Darby departed from those original principles. As to why he did, we will probably never know for sure. We will probably never know why he substituted in its place his own theory of unity, i.e. separation from evil. It would be nothing but conjecture to speculate; but one fact remains—when he made an appeal to separation from evil being the basis for God’s unity, and so the basis of our unity, he broadened the term of sin or evil that required separation and thus excommunication to every known sin or evil, for if that was not the case one would have to conclude that God’s unity was only based on separation from some evil, but not all evil, which, of course, would be a blasphemous thought. If one says that God’s unity is based upon separation from evil, it must be separation from all evil, even the smallest taint of sin or evil, which would mean our unity would by definition all be based upon separation from all evil, even the smallest taint of sin or evil!

But that is why separation from evil is not God’s basis of unity as we have already shown. His unity is based upon consubstantiality and

coinherence. It is based upon eternal perfection. It is based upon one Eternal and Divine Substance possessed equally by the Father, and by the Son and the Holy Spirit, without change or diminution.

And so we see that the early brethren did not hold to our brother Darby's view of separation from evil being the basis of the unity of the Spirit. They understood that while many things were evil, only certain evil needed to be separated from in the sense of excommunication. They knew that if God made separation from evil a perquisite for unity, there would be no one left in any Assembly on earth from which to separate from!

Perhaps, it should be mentioned (lest someone might think that those early brethren, therefore, were completely lackadaisical toward evil) that the word evil was used by them for those things which today we would more than likely use the word "sin" instead. To say that only certain evil needed to be separated from in the sense of excommunication might seem foreign to the modern ear, for it seems to imply that they did not take seriously those awful sins of the flesh, like immorality or adultery or drunkenness. That simply is not true. They did believe such sin or evil required excommunication. But to them the term evil included all things not found in God. Therefore, to them the term evil also included anything that was less than perfect, whether it was simply being undisciplined in our walk with the Lord, or a man-made tradition that made void the Word of God, or wrong interpretations of Scripture, or non-biblical practices introduced into Church worship, or even those things of the human soul and spirit, like selfish attitudes, prideful hearts, or party spirits not yet resulting in actual division. All these other things they also considered evil, as all those things were certainly *evil* in the sight of God, but they were understood as an *evil* that did not require separation in the sense of excommunication. Rather, they required forbearance, love, prayer, and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. And so, they could still give their greeting to a brother or to an Assembly that might be still struggling with some of these issues (evil) in their life or in their Assembly life. But that did not mean they tolerated all evil *carte blanche*. This explains why our brother Groves could say: "I would INFINITELY RATHER BEAR with all their evils, than be required to SEPARATE from THEIR GOOD!"¹⁹

¹⁹ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 25

And so we see that, yes, all these things were still *evil* from God's perspective, but God never commanded us to separate from every brother or Assembly that might have these other types of evil still present in their life or in their midst. To those early brethren all sin was evil and all evil was sin. But they also recognized that we all have some sin (evil) in our lives, some of which we may not yet be aware (like spiritual pride, envy, self-love, etc.). As such, they knew we must be merciful and loving to each other, for we all are still sinners saved by grace. They used the word evil for all sin, even those hidden sins of the heart. They did not just reserve it for those awful, dark outward sins of the flesh. So they would be just as likely to say that a brother filled with spiritual pride was practicing evil as to say that a brother filled with spiritual pride was sinning. But they did not necessarily say that a brother practicing such evil must be separated from in order to maintain the unity of Spirit. But that never did that mean they did not care about evil.

But when our brother Darby used the word "evil" in accordance with the very nature of the Godhead, and in accordance with the unity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, he essentially created a scenario wherein he could excommunicate anyone and any Assembly that might disagree with his decisions, or with any decision made by the one Assembly in London, by simply declaring them evil, for, obviously, since he thought he was right and the one Assembly in London was right, being guided by the Holy Spirit, anyone that would not agree with him or the Assembly, obviously, must be out of step with the Holy Spirit, and so by definition must be evil! Thus, since God can never be in unity with evil, that person or Assembly that is considered to be out of step, must be separated from as evil, unless they repented of their disagreement with the one Assembly in London and so the Holy Spirit. That was the end result of his creation of a basis for unity being separation from evil rather than the basis of our unity being Christ in us, the hope of glory, or our being placed into Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30b), or, of course, the precious blood of Christ that was shed upon the cross.

He may not have done so knowingly, but the end result of his theory was that he could appeal to the holiness and nature of God as being the reason for his need to excommunicate and separate from any brother, sister, and/or Assembly he deemed evil. For if the holiness and nature of God is the standard we use to excommunicate and separate ourselves from anything we deem evil, no one could stand before God and pass the test, in and of themselves. If that that is the standard we use, we all are evil,

including our brother Darby! In fact, one could argue that by exceeding what is written in Scripture by his arbitrary excommunications of entire Assemblies, he was practicing evil in the name of separating from evil! This would mean, of course, that the Assembly he was currently in, must therefore separate from him, for was he free from every taint of evil or sin in his life? If they were to maintain and manifest the unity of the Spirit, according to his theory, would they not also have to separate from him and, indeed, from each other?!

So we can see how our brother completely departed from the original principles of unity first taught by those led by the Holy Spirit in those early days in Dublin. In fact, he, himself, departed from what he taught in those early days, as revealed in a letter he wrote in 1839.

“Whenever the first great truth of redemption in a word, whenever Christ has received a person, we would receive him. That false brethren *may creep in unawares* is possible. If the Church be spiritual, they will soon be made apparent, but as our table is the Lord’s, not ours, we receive all that the Lord has received, all who have fled as poor sinners for refuge to the hope set before them, and rest not in themselves, but in Christ, as their hope. We then afterwards teach them as they are able, according to the grace, and knowledge, and wisdom we have received—all the truth we have received at God’s hands; and here it is that ministry comes in. We do not make a creed, **but Christ, the ground and term of union**; but trusting to the help and ever-watchful and ready care of the Lord over us, and the true and real presence of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, seek and give all the instruction, exhortation, comfort, and when need arises rebuke in love, we are enabled. One may lay the foundation, and all that are on it we receive, and another build thereon; and they must take heed how they build thereon. **You may say, ‘But there will be false teachers.’ So God has taught us, and all your plans will not prevent it; but the grace of God will overrule it, enable us to detect them by the word, and turn it to good...** There will be heresies there must needs be, says the Apostle, that they which are approved may be made manifest.”²⁰

“...**You say, ‘Would you receive a Roman Catholic?’** If a Roman Catholic really extolled Jesus as a Saviour and His one sacrifice of Himself as the sole putting away of sin, he would have ceased to hold the error and delusion by which the enemy has misled some souls, (who are still I would trust precious to Jesus), he would have ceased to be a Roman Catholic in the evil sense of the word, and on those terms only could he be with us. **I repeat then, we receive all who are on the foundation, and reject and put away all error by the word of**

²⁰ Kelly, James; Darby, J. N., *The Claims of the Church of England Considered; Being the Close of a Correspondence Between the Rev. James Kelly of Stillogan, Ireland, and J.N. Darby* (W. H. Broom, London, 1864), pg. 65-66

God and the help of His ever blessed, ever living Spirit, and ever present Spirit.”²¹

So we can see that even our brother Darby at first believed that God’s principle of unity was “Christ, the ground and term of union.” That is what all the early brethren believed and so practiced—from A. N. Groves to Edward Cronin to Lord Congleton (John Parnell), to J. G. Bellett, to our brother Darby himself. So it was our brother Darby who departed from those original principles, not those other brothers he later condemned. At some point his view changed from “Christ, the ground and term of union—God’s principle of unity,” to “Separation from evil—God’s principle of unity.” It was an unfortunate change, for it caused much heartache to many brethren.

But let’s continue our examination of his theory and its contradictory nature as put into practice by him and those who followed him. We will continue with the last sentence of the quote that we first began this chapter with, where he said, “But here there is a certain modification of it.”

“Separation from evil is the necessary consequence of the presence of the Spirit of God under all circumstances as to conduct and fellowship. **But here there is a certain modification of it.** “The revealed presence of God is always judicial when it exists; because power against evil is connected with the holiness which rejects it. Thus in Israel God’s presence was judicial; His government was there, which did not allow of evil. So, though in another manner, it is in the church. God’s presence is judicial there—not in the world, save in testimony, because God is not yet revealed in the world; and hence it plucks up no tares out of that field. But it judges them that are within... **If it refuse to answer to the very nature and character of God,** and to the incompatibility of that nature with evil (so that it becomes really a false witness for God), then the first and **immutable principle** recurs, **the evil must be separated from.**”²²

Here, in his continuing dissertation on unity, he contradicts himself again. He states that “If it refuse to answer to the very nature and character of God,” meaning an Assembly that has allowed some form of evil to remain in its midst, then “the first and immutable principle recurs, the evil must be separated from,” meaning the faithful Assembly must separate (i.e. by excommunication) from the faithless Assembly. But

²¹ Ibid., pg. 68

²² J. N. D., *Separation from Evil, the Principle, and Grace the Power of Unity* (W. B. Horner, Manchester, c. 1878) pg. 17-19

what happened to his view mentioned above that God modifies His separation from evil, acting judicially?

If God modifies it, why does our brother Darby say that separation from evil is an “immutable principle” (immutable, of course, meaning unchangeable)? It was he who tied separation of evil as a principle of God’s unity to be our principle for unity because we are to conform our actions to God’s action. But if that is true, then why does he not declare that we should also conform our actions to God’s act of “modification,” as he writes above?

He contradicts himself in a number of ways. First, if separation from evil is an “immutable principle,” tied to the very nature of God, God could never allow evil to remain even for one second in His kingdom, for He is omnipresent! And, yet our brother says God modifies it. How is it immutable, if it is modified! Dear brethren, the nature of God can never be modified, nor does God ever act contrary to His nature in any way. All of His decisions are righteous, holy, and true. And so, what our brother **perceives as a modification is not a modification at all, but rather God acting in perfect accordance with own nature**, of which we, too, are to act through Christ Jesus and the Spirit of God.

Consequently, when God allows evil to remain in the midst of His kingdom for an entire dispensation, during which time He refuses to separate the evil tares from the wheat (Matt. 13:36-43), He is not modifying His nature or holiness. He is not making a modification of it. Rather, He is acting in accordance with His nature and holiness and His children should understand how it is in accordance with His nature and so act the same righteous way.

But let’s assume, for the moment, our brother is correct and God does modify His separation from evil judicially. Let us consider that line of thinking in light of his subsequent actions that excommunicated entire Assemblies because they did not agree with his judgments regarding certain issues. If God’s modification is true, why does our brother not have the same modification in himself? Why does he not conform his thinking to God’s thinking, his actions to God’s actions. Why does he not then exercise the same forbearance that God exercises toward evil?

Equally, continuing with the premise that our brother Darby is correct (which he is not), but assuming that what our brother says is true, why then cannot an Assembly decide to act judicially like God acts judicially in His kingdom, and so be longsuffering for a time, hoping for the

repentance of the sinner and the eventual sanctification of the Spirit? And if our brother Darby or others decide the forbearance of the Assembly has reached its end, why cannot they trust the Chief Shepherd to discipline and if necessary remove the lampstand out of its place, according to His wisdom, as revealed in Scripture (e. g. Rev. 2:5)?

Or let's even use brother Darby's example of God's judicial acts in Israel in the Old Testament as a modification of His "separation from evil" as **"the necessary consequence of the presence of the Spirit of God under all circumstances, in regard to conduct and fellowship."** If that is an example of God that we are to use for God's modification of His separation from evil, did He not sometimes modify it, being longsuffering for twenty years, sometimes for forty years, or sometimes for entire generations before finally acting judicially (e. g. Judges 8-10; 16-21)? In fact, for King David's sake, did not God suffer long with evil in Judah, during the forty years of Solomon's reign, and during the reign of many of the kings after him (e.g. see II Kings 8:18-19)? Or how about the longsuffering of God in the days of Noah in which he waited over a century before judicially judging the earth of its evil (see Gen.6; I Pet. 3:20).

If there was a "certain modification" of God's "separating from evil" in the Old Testament, using Darby's terminology, in some cases for many, many years, in which God's equally important attributes of longsuffering, love and mercy were manifested, who is Mr. Darby to say that another Assembly's method of judicially dealing with evil in their midst with the same attribute of love, patience and longsuffering, just as God did with Israel, is not equally acceptable. If God can still be holy and righteous with such judicial modifications, why cannot an Assembly remain holy and righteous in their judicial modifications in accordance with what they feel is the leading of the Holy Spirit? Who is our brother Darby to decide when such modification has run its course? (Again, we are speaking based upon the premise that our brother Darby is correct in his viewpoints. We will discuss later under a chapter dealing with Assembly discipline those things requiring excommunication. We are talking about that evil which another Assembly's elders are dealing with in love and admonition, which should be respected by other Assemblies as being between them, as the under shepherds, with Him, who is the Chief Shepherd over them.)

Each Assembly stands or falls before the Lord. The spiritual audacity and pride expressed by our brother Darby and the one Assembly of God in

London were breathtaking. In many ways it expressed the same mindset expressed by the Roman Catholic Church. If God can modify (using our brother Darby's terminology) His dealing with certain types of evil because of His forbearance, while remaining righteous and holy, why cannot those appointed by the Holy Spirit to oversee another Assembly, modify their dealing with certain types of evil within the Assembly as they feel led by the Holy Spirit, without being accused by our brother Darby, as being very evil by such forbearance, and not being righteous or holy at all in their decision? It is not up to him, or up to another Assembly, or up to another group of Christian leaders, to usurp the authority of the under-shepherds in another Assembly, let alone the authority of the Chief Shepherd in that Assembly!

But let's continue. Most certainly, we are not questioning the right of our brother Darby, or an Assembly that agrees with him, to judge this or that about another Assembly's actions. What we are addressing is the wholesale excommunication of an entire Assembly by another Assembly, simply because that other Assembly has determined that the other Assembly's time for judicial restraint has ended!

This is what is important to realize. Perhaps, that one Assembly is right and the time for longsuffering by the other Assembly has long ago ceased, but that is not their decision to make. We should, in one sense, mind our own business and attend to our own Assembly, and just make sure, if that is the case, that we do not allow the perceived evil in another Assembly to take root in our own Assembly (cf. I Thess. 4:9-12). Wholesale excommunication is the Lord's prerogative, not ours. We are called to individual discipline and excommunication within our own Assembly, not within another Assembly. Anything beyond that is presumptuous and evil in and of itself! Let me repeat this—"Anything beyond that is presumptuous and evil in and of itself!" Why is that so? The answer is because all presumptuous sins are evil because they betray a lack of faith in the shepherding of the Chief Shepherd, and a lack of faith in God the Father to discipline His children. If an Assembly ignores the Lord and tolerates an evil that should not be tolerated, the Lord Jesus is more than capable of removing the lampstand from its place, thus dealing with that evil. That is His right and prerogative, not ours. God never delegated in this dispensation such an authority to an individual or to an individual in concert with another Assembly. As we saw in Volume I of this book, all Assemblies established by the Apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were autonomous.

So any way we look at it, our brother Darby's viewpoint of the unity of the Spirit being based upon a principle of separation from evil being rooted in the very nature of God is simply not biblical and is detrimental to the spiritual being of the saints. It eventually led him to lord it over other saints, something even the apostle Paul would never do (II Cor. 1:24).

II Corinthians 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

His theory is not rooted in Scripture, and it simply will not bear the fruit of righteousness, nor manifest the fruit of the Spirit, nor express the true unity of the Spirit. In fact, in a very short time it began to bear the fruit of unrighteousness, as well as much spiritual pride in the hearts of many saints, which in reality is really one of the worst evils, is it not?

How ironic it was that those who were so keen on separating from evil ended up tolerating evil among themselves. They loved having the preeminence among other Assemblies, and so, rather than trusting and believing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within his Church to oversee and to discipline each Assembly, they assumed that role themselves.

For instance, let me provide an example as to how this mistaken practice of separation from any evil as a basis for the unity of the Spirit bore the fruit of spiritual pride and arrogance in certain brethren in London in latter part of the nineteenth century.

It all began when one of the many Assemblies in London decided to move their meeting place from the Walworth district of London to nearby district in London called Peckham. Both districts were located in the southeastern part of London. But because this Assembly made this decision without fellowshipping and getting the approval from what was called at the time the London Central Meeting (sometimes controlled by the Priory²³) which consisted of certain leading brothers from all the Assemblies in London, that Assembly was viewed as being out of

²³ The Priory was the name of the building in central London where many of these decisions regarding excommunication were made. It was also the place (Islington in London) where Darby would usually worship and break bread when in town. Later the meeting was moved to 57 Park Street which was a short walking distance from Darby's residence in London at Lonsdale Square.

communion, and therefore could not be recognized at the Lord's Table until they repented.

Of course, that Assembly that made the move of their meeting place disagreed, for they had the liberty in Christ to meet where they felt led by the Lord to meet. But, since our brother Darby and those in the London Central Meeting thought otherwise, they considered the decision and action of that Assembly to be an evil decision.

Well, later on, someone from that assembly, now meeting in Peckham, by the name of Goodwill, moved away from London to Sheffield, about 175 miles north. The assembly at Sheffield received him as a brother in the Lord, but because the other assemblies in London disapproved of the assembly in Peckham, moving without their approval, and since he was from Peckham and yet the assembly in Sheffield still received him, the assembly in Sheffield was also excluded or put out!

Dear brethren, nowhere in Scripture did the apostle ever exercise such authority, or even would presume to exercise such authority. The only ones in Scripture that presumed to act with such authority was, perhaps, those brothers in Jerusalem who opposed Paul, and those in Asia who along with Diotrephes opposed the apostle John (which, in both cases, Scripture censures).

If one is called to judge evil, one must judge all evil. If one wants to cast out the mote in a brother's eye, they must cast out the beam in their own eye. Our brother Darby was "lording" it over the saints and "lording" it over the Assemblies in conjunction with those brothers in London, putting out entire Assemblies with which they disagreed. It was wrong and sinful, and if one identifies sin with evil, one must admit their actions and attitudes were evil. How ironic, if they were really intent on separating from evil, they should have separated from each other.

However, since none of us are infallible, and since one's perceptions of certain historical occurrences can be colored by one's own preconceptions, let's be fair and read Darby's own account of this episode so the reader can judge for themselves and not just accept my take on the occurrence. In one of his letters, Darby wrote:

"It is anxiously insisted on, in a tract published by Yapp, that no assembly can be defiled by receiving evil, but only the individuals who accept it. But your letters, as does that tract, make independent churches, each acting for itself. If this be the case, the unity which constituted the whole being of the brethren is

wholly given up; that for which I left the Establishment is wholly gone. All this I reject wholly and absolutely. The circumstances I do not pretend to know, for I was in America; but if I have rightly gathered them...you have judged the conduct of brethren in [London] without having heart what they have to say. I understood the breach arose between you and [Rotherham] by reason of your reception of [Goodall]. With the main facts of his case I am acquainted, for I took part in what passed, and now allow me to put the case as it stands as to him. I put it merely as a principle. He (or anyone else) is rejected in [London]. The **Assembly in [London]** have weighed, and I with them, the case, and counted him as either excommunicated or in schism. I put the two cases, for I only speak of the principle. I take part in this act, **and hold him to be outside the Church of God on earth, being outside (in either case) what represents it in [London]**; I am bound by Scripture to count him so. I come to [Sheffield]; **there he breaks bread, and is—in what? Not in the Church of God on earth**, for he is out of it in [London], and there are not two churches on earth, cannot be, so as to be in one and out of another. How can I refuse to eat with him in [London] and break bread with him in [Sheffield], have one conscience for [London], and another conscience for [Sheffield]; believe the Spirit judges one way at [London], and another for [Sheffield]. It is confusion and disorder.²⁴

So we can see from his own letter the spiritual pride and presumption that arose as a result of his theory of separation from evil being the basis of God's unity. Brother Darby judged what was right and what was wrong, not just for himself, but for others, along with what was considered to be the one Assembly of God in London, represented by the London Central Meeting. They took upon themselves an authority not found in Scripture. That in itself is an evil and a sin, the sin of presumption. They judged and separated from what they considered evil in another Assembly while they ignored and never separated from the evil within themselves!

Psalm 19:12-13 Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.¹³ Keep back thy servant also from **presumptuous sins**; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. KJV

And then, when we look beyond the unbiblical basis of their London Central Meeting to judge, and look closer to the judgment they made, we see that even the decision they made was sinful, evil and presumptuous,

²⁴ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 257 (All names in brackets have been supplied to bring continuity; in the second edition of letters the names were left blank, or as in the case of London, simply had the letter L.)

for they excommunicated an entire Assembly (which can only be done by the Lord). Nowhere in Scripture do we ever find the excommunication of an entire Assembly by another Assembly or individual. The Holy Spirit has never established such a principle. It is a man-made tradition.

And, not only that, the reason behind their excommunication was also not biblical, but very presumptuous. There was no heresy involved, nor any sin requiring excommunication. The decision of the brothers in Peckham was a personal decision before the Lord. They committed no sin. It was just an issue of some brethren exercising their liberty in Christ about where to meet. Darby and those with him called there decision evil because they never submitted it to the other brothers to be decided by them all. They called their decision evil because it was contrary to what brother Darby and others believed was the will of God. Where did God in Scripture ever give such authority to a group of men over many other Assemblies? Even the apostles never wielded such authority. They never set up such a system of governance. In one sense, it is almost as if our brother Darby was acting like Ignatius in the second century; he was acting like a city-wide bishop, along with his presbyters, ruling over a metropolitan diocese, in this case London.

Imagine if the apostle Paul acted as brother Darby acted when Paul desired Apollo to come to Corinth (which like the brothers in Peckham was a decision of individual liberty). Paul must have believed it was the will of God, for I do not believe that Paul did things without first seeking the will of the Lord. In fact, Paul must have been so sure that it was God's will since Scripture says that he "strongly urged" Apollos to come, and yet, obviously, Apollos did not agree (just as the brothers in Peckham and Sheffield did not agree with brother Darby and the other brethren in London as to what God's will was in regard to the issue before them).

I Corinthians 16:12 Now concerning *our* brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time. NKJV

And yet, Paul did not censure Apollo because he came to a different conclusion, as Darby censured the brothers in Peckham. Nor did Paul accuse him of evil, putting him out of the Church of God on earth as Darby and the other brethren did to those in Peckham and Sheffield. If

one wishes to assign evil to those in Sheffield, one cannot ignore the evil in London.

Beloved, this false view of separation from evil as being the basis of God's unity, has borne the fruit of presumption and spiritual pride, as well as that evil found in "lording" it over brethren in ways not even done by an apostle of Christ. It is reminiscent of the presumption and "lording" done by the Roman Catholic Church.

Before we continue, let me provide the witness of by Henry Groves, the son of Anthony Norris Groves, who, upon examination of this entire issue, came to this same conclusion. He will first speak to the phrase the "one Assembly of God," and then will speak to what led up to this whole, unfortunate situation, wherein God's Word was violated and an unbiblical act was committed by those who lorded it over other brethren.

"*The one Assembly of God*" is an expression that first came into use in 1861, as the term whereby to designate those confederate gatherings that acted in unison with Mr. Darby. It is not an expression used once accidentally, it occurs reiteratedly in the ecclesiastical documents of the party, and hence deserves our consideration. It does not appear with whom this presumptuous title originated, but probably it did not originate with Mr. Darby; for it is not likely, deep and grievous as his departure from God's principle of Church fellowship has been, that he would have been the one to give currency to an expression, which he could not but perceive would tell more against the catholicity he claims for his party, than any other that could well have been used. It recalls similar titles assumed by others, and may henceforth be ranked with "the one Holy and Catholic Church" of Rome, or "the Catholic and Apostolic Church" of the Irvingites, as the party's designation of itself."²⁵

"Mr. Darby, however, who has all along held the position claimed, endorses the expression, and gives additional meaning to it, when in a letter written a little later, speaking of one excluded from the Darbyite Assemblies in London, he writes, "*I hold him to be outside the Church of God on earth, being outside what represents it in London.*" Beyond the pale of an anti-Christian communion, no such arrogant assumption has been made; and it has been reserved for Darbyism to develop a system which, upon the smallest basis, should erect the most tremendous superstructure – a superstructure which, in the intolerance of its claim and the boldness of its assertion, reminds us of the days of Papal power in the middle ages. How has the humble gathering of the two or three in the name of Jesus, from a "church in ruins," been forgotten and set aside by this new dogma! And, instead of it, a position [is] taken which is destructive of scriptural

²⁵ Henry Groves, *Darbyism: Its Rise, Progress, and Development*, 3rd edition (James E. Hawkins, London, c.1880) pg. 58-59

church standing. Can it be believed possible, that those who started with the acknowledgment of the individual responsibility of all saints to Christ, should dwindle down into the position here taken, so as to assert, that being outside their small Assemblies in London is “outside the Church of God on earth”? That original principles could be so openly repudiated, and former testimony so entirely forgotten? But so it is. These progressive steps in ecclesiasticism it is important to notice, as showing how soon one who excommunicated Mr. Newton in 1845, on the ground of clericalism, should fall into an ecclesiasticism, that embodies in itself worse evils than those condemned in another...The rule laid down is, that if one rejected in London is received in Sheffield, the gathering in Sheffield is *ipso facto* excommunicated also, and the fellowship of that Assembly with “the Church of God on earth” is destroyed! But what if another Assembly were to act in the same way towards the Assemblies in London, would they be thereby excluded from “the Church of God on earth”? Or do they possess, like the See of Rome, a peculiar commission, and an infallible authority? Well may godly hearts tremble at the blasphemy of thus using the name of the Spirit of our God, to sanction man’s self-will, vindictiveness, mistakes, or follies. This spirit in Diotrephes once cut off the beloved apostle from the church – a love of pre-eminence had filled his heart, and he placed him outside what he might call “the Church of God on earth” (if such folly and wickedness were probable in those days), to which the apostle simply says, “If I come, I will remember his deeds,” meeting the arrogance and sin of another, with the gentleness and meekness of Christ. The apostolic power of binding and loosing has been often assumed by many professing to be the Church of God, but never were divine principles of truth more subverted, nor higher light more sinned against, than in the claims under consideration.”²⁶

“Before proceeding any further, let us take a glance at this infallible Assembly – “the one Assembly of God in London”...and their proceedings which led to the placing of the Assembly in Sheffield outside “the Church of God upon earth.”...In the chain of excommunications that ended in the exclusion of the Sheffield Assembly, the first link is that Mr. A. Stewart is charged by the Priory leaders with having “grievously violated the Lord’s presence at His table, and the consciences of the saints, by forcing his ministry,” and in “having declared he had nothing to confess;” and consequently the leaders state “to their brethren of the one Assembly of God in London,” that “they can no longer have communion with him at the table of the Lord.” He is in consequence put “outside the Church of God on earth.

On this the Walworth gathering asked of the Priory meeting, “What sin or sins, according to Scripture, of an excommunicable character,” he had committed. “Three letters,” say the Sheffield brethren, “were afterwards received from the Priory brethren in answer to the above, assuming throughout that the offence in

²⁶ Ibid., pg. 59-61

April, 1860, described as “grievous against the Lord’s presence and His people,” was “*of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture.*” This was not satisfactory to godly consciences becoming alive to the principles at work, **and they added to this, in that they “in self-will,” as it was called, removed their place of meeting from Walworth to Peckham. The result of these unpleasant questions put, and of the self-will of going to Peckham without permission, was the following communication: that “those associated with the Peckham meeting, cannot be accredited at the Lord’s table till they are humbled for their course.”** The saints meeting at Peckham are therefore also put outside “the Church of God on earth.” Mr. Goodall, a member of the Peckham meeting, goes to Sheffield. The brethren composing the meeting in that place, after due investigation, considering he had been unrighteously put out of fellowship by the Priory, receive him, and are told as follows: “You have now placed yourselves in the same position as Mr. Goodall; viz., outside the communion of the saints gathered in London.” **Thus an Assembly of saints in Sheffield is likewise placed outside “the Church of God on earth.**

The godly heart sickens and saddens, as it reads and examines the grounds for committing the most solemn act of excluding from the fellowship of the church. We find “self-will” charged, “consciences violated,” “want of humility,” “the Lord’s presence at the table violated,” but nothing of God’s word violated, or of His precepts set aside. Let all who unbiasedly read these London proceedings judge where the self-will seems most to be – who have the greatest need to be humbled – who have violated the sacred name, presence, and blood of Jesus, and the consciences of His blood-bought people? Who? The excommunicators or the excommunicated? There is no false doctrine charged, nor any laxity of discipline; but there lies at the bottom of all these high-handed actings the same spring, whether the case be that of Peckham, of Sheffield, or of Bristol, and that charge is the one twice given by the Priory rulers connected with these excommunications (pp. 15–30), the charge of “independency.” **The aim of “the one Assembly,” under the leadership of Mr. Darby and his friends, is to establish a church authority of their own, of which they are to form the centre, in the name of the Holy Ghost; and, in order to maintain it, this wholesale discipline is necessary; and we are told that “to ignore the discipline of the Assembly in London,” is “virtually to deny the unity of the body.”** These monstrous theories hang together – the unscriptural views of that wherein the unity of the body of Christ consisted being originated, to support an ungodly discipline, which must otherwise have fallen to the ground.”²⁷

And so we see the danger that comes from adopting a basis for manifesting the unity of the Spirit that is not found in Scripture, nor practiced by the apostles of Christ. Sinless perfection, or perfection from any taint of evil, does not occur till we are glorified with Christ. Until then we all have the taint of evil upon us when we sin, and since that is

²⁷ Ibid., pg. 61-63

true, Darby's whole system of unity of the Spirit among Churches vanishes, becoming an unattainable goal in this life, for one main reason—i.e. that everyone's list of what is the evil that must be separated from, will vary according to one's own prejudices and motives, and according to one's own view of themselves as being the more righteous ones in the matter (see Romans 14). This is what happened in the case of Peckham. Their evil was following what they perceived as the will of God, but without first fellowshiping with other Assemblies represented in the London Central Meeting and receiving their permission. Where in Scripture does the Holy Spirit ever tell us to excommunicate an entire Assembly because of that supposed sin or evil?

When as Christians, we begin to add to the list of sins requiring excommunication (because of a zeal to separate from evil) we become guilty of the same sin that many Israelites, especially those of the Pharisees, committed in the Lord's day when they were so zealous for righteousness that they built an hedge (the oral law) about the Law, thereby" separating" themselves from all they considered evil, all in order to protect the sanctity of Israel and the purity their own righteousness before God. Their goal may have been noble, but their actions to achieve that goal were not, for they trusted in their own righteousness.

What is so interesting (for there is nothing new under the sun) is that they too used separation from evil as a basis for their unity. In fact the name Pharisee, itself, means "separation." They were so zealous in their practice of separation that **they believed that they alone were the ones who were representing the "true Israel,"** as those who followed Darby in London thought they were the true ones representing the Church of God on earth, at least what represented it in London.

Regarding this truth of the Pharisees, Emil Schürer states the following—

"In the New Testament also and in Josephus the Pharisees evidently appear as a decided fraction of the people. In the same sense also must their name be explained. It is in Hebrew רִשְׁיִתִּים...whence the Greek Φαρισαῖοι. That this literally means "the separated" is undoubted. The only question can be, to what to refer the term. Are they those who separate themselves from all uncleanness and all illegality, or those who separate themselves from certain persons? ...They might so have called themselves, because they kept as far as possible from all uncleanness, and therefore also from contact with unclean persons. Or they might have been so named in a reproachful sense by their adversaries, as "the

separatists,” who for the sake of their own special cleanness separated themselves from the bulk of the nation. The latter was certainly the original meaning of the name.... Consequently Pharisaism estimates itself as very specially **the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*. Only the circle of the Pharisaic association represents the true Israel**, who perfectly observe the law and have therefore a claim to the promises.”²⁸

They were so zealous in their separation that they even considered the touch of one they considered evil to be an affront to sanctity of God (cf. Luke 7:39). Alfred Edersheim also describes such a mindset—

“...meeting a Pharisee face to face his identity could still less be doubted. His self-satisfied, or else mock-modest or ostentatiously meek bearing would betray him, even irrespective of his superciliousness towards others, his avoidance of every touch of persons or things which he held unclean, and his extravagant religious displays.”²⁹

Perhaps, their motives may have been good, i.e. a desire for complete holiness and separation from evil, but they exceeded what is written in Scripture with their narrow applications, thus eliciting the Lord’s rebuke that they were nullifying God’s Word by their system of separation codified into man-made traditions. They were so deceived in their self-righteousness that, in essence, by arguing with Jesus, they were telling the LORD God Himself, who was sinless, pure and holy, who had not the least taint of evil, and who was standing right before them, that they were wiser in protecting the purity of Israel than God Himself (for the one they argued with was very God of very God). But in their supposed wisdom and sanctity, they were ignorant and sinful. They considered themselves *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, which is Latin for “little church in the church” (which in their minds would be, “true Israel in Israel”), and yet, in reality it was the One standing before them that represented that which Israel should have been; but they knew Him not.

In the same way, when our zeal exceeds the zeal of the Lord and we develop of system and mindset where we are allowed to excommunicate entire Churches *in toto*, without examining each and every saint individually, as Scripture commands, we also become guilty of considering ourselves as the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, “true Church in the

²⁸ Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Part 2, Volume 2, 2nd Ed.* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1893) pg. 19-21, 24

²⁹ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (The Religious Tract Society, London, 1876) pg. 215

Church.” (Yet even in that it would not be biblical for only the individual in one’s own Assembly can be excommunicated. One Assembly cannot excommunicate another individual in another Assembly in Scripture unless that one becomes a part of their Assembly.)

Is this not what happened to our brother Darby and those with him when they believed they were the one true Church upon earth in the Church, believing that if one disagreed with them on a matter, then that one was “outside the Church of God on earth, being outside (in either case) what represents it in [London].”

Such an attitude is evil in and of itself, for it betrays nothing but a heart filled with spiritual pride. It betrays a lack of faith in the Chief Shepherding of the Lord, and is simply another form of self-righteousness (of which we should all be on our guard against). It is a spiritual blindness that desperately needs eye-salve.

Revelation 3:17-18 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. KJV

Beloved, until we are perfect (Phil. 3:12) we will always have a need for that gold that has been tried by fire; we will most certainly always be in need of the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness (yea, into eternity), and we will always need the eye-salve of the Spirit to anoint our eyes until the time comes we are fully glorified and perfected and so can always see aright. What Christian can boast that they no longer need such things?

Beloved, this truth should give us all pause (by which, I include myself). Indeed, we must be careful to never boast before others, as if we are the only ones seeing things more spiritually than our brother Darby and those who were with him were seeing. Despite their wrong judgment and evil in this matter, they were still seeking, in their own mind, at least, to be holy for the Lord. And, in that their motives were good, if not their actions.

We are all sinners saved by grace. Yes, it is important to bear witness to the truth and defend those who have been wrongly treated, but such witness should always be done with humility, for most assuredly, in the

light of Christ, we also have our own faults or shortcomings, some of which we may not even see! Perhaps, our brother Darby might be wrong on this or that, but can we say with absolute certainty that we might not be wrong on this or that. All we can do is humbly bear witness to the truth of Scripture with full recognition that we are all sinners saved by grace, ever in need of forgiveness and cleansing by the precious blood of Christ.

Yes, our brother sinned by his false excommunications and judgments, but we must also recognize that if our own thoughts and actions are ever measured against those of the Lord Jesus Christ, who could ever stand? We may judge that which our brother Darby did as being evil in its own right, but can we say that there is nothing in us with which the Lord Jesus could not equally judge us, if not in actions, then, perhaps, in motives and thoughts? Self-righteousness is such an awful sin and evil!

And so, we must all learn to always “speak the truth in love” (in much humility), knowing always that we all sin and fall short the glory of God. As the apostle John wrote: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8 KJV).

And so, beloved, may the following prayer always be a prayer of our hearts, for until we are glorified and fully sanctified we will all have some type of evil in us, of which we may not be aware, but evil is evil nonetheless, and if not for the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin, and the love of God that is longsuffering in this time of sanctification, we would all be sinners most miserable, separated from God by even the smallest and most insignificant evil in our heart.

Yes, our God is most Holy, and we are but sinners saved by grace—but praise be to the Lord, the veil has been torn in two by the grace, mercy and love of our God toward us in Christ Jesus our Lord by His blood—”Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know; nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Psalm 19:12-13 Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*. ¹³ Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. KJV

Why Separation from Evil Was Not the Basis for the Unity of the Spirit in the Church

Before we examine the God's true principle of unity, we must understand why "separation from evil" was never God's principle of unity for His Church.

The reason is simply such a concept glorifies man and not God. God's true principle of unity has always been rooted in Himself for in that way the glory belongs to Him. In this, it is no different than our salvation and is why salvation was never rooted in man's ability to maintain a certain standard of righteousness; if it was, it too would bring glory to man and not to God.

Scripture tells us that God the Father has saved us, not by our own works of righteousness, but according to his mercy. He did not save based upon our ability to separate from evil, by which we could establish our own righteousness. That was the principle of the Pharisees. Rather, God saved us by the regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. He saved us not by our good works, but by the atoning work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour and His own righteousness.

Titus 3:5-7 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; ⁶ Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; ⁷ That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. KJV

It truly is all of Him. God's principle of salvation is based upon the redemptive work of Christ Jesus that is granted to all by faith in His Son; it is never based upon our ability to maintain a "separation from evil," or upon our ability to maintain a certain level of good works. In fact, Scripture states that in reality we are the result of God's workmanship, not our own, and the reason given for this is so that we might not boast.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. KJV

Oh the pride of man, even the Christian man. It seems that we as Christians always love to boast and, unfortunately, if separation from evil

was truly God's principle of unity for the Church, it would simply give an opportunity for more boasting; it would provide fodder for the spiritual pride of man. It would lead to Christians measuring themselves by themselves, rather than by measuring themselves by Christ (II Cor. 10:12).

II Corinthians 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; **but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.** NASB

It would cause ones to boast that they are more spiritual than other brethren for they would believe that they are the ones who have separated from evil, while others have not. This theory of separation from evil as the Church's principle of unity simply brings glory to man, not to God, just as a belief that salvation is by works and not by grace through faith would bring glory to man, and not to God.

The religious nature that we inherited from Adam (which is still within us, even though positionally it has been crucified with Christ—Rom. 6:6) will always desire praise for itself, whether for salvation or for sanctification. That is why the Christian must always reckon themselves dead unto sin (Rom. 6:11). A religious unsaved man will always want to receive credit for their own salvation, thinking it is based upon their own works of righteousness, and the Adamic nature of a saved religious man will always want to receive credit for their sanctification, thinking it is based upon their ability to separate from evil.

It causes Christians to think they are purer than other Christians. And that is not to say that some Christians are, indeed, purer than other Christians in their walk—Paul speaks of spiritual Christians, soulical Christians and carnal Christians. That is not the problem. The problem is when that purity and separation is held in their heart as a boast. When that occurs such boasting is simply the result of spiritual blindness and spiritual pride. And, in fact, it reveals that those Christians are not as separated from evil or pure as they think, for such boasting is an evil in and of itself. It is simply another of one of the many other sins of the soul that lurk in the heart of many a Christian. It includes such soulical sins as—**pride**, thinking very highly of oneself and of one's ability—**jealousy**, **envy**, i.e. wanting to have as much or more spiritual influence over others, as someone else seemingly does—**slander**, **evil speaking**, i.e. backbiting, gossiping, speaking behind peoples backs—**grumbling**, **murmuring**, i.e. complaining about another brother, whether openly, or

in one's heart, especially about one who has more influence among the brethren— **quarreling, wrath, strife, divisiveness**, i.e. always arguing with anyone who might disagree with you, and always having to “set someone straight”—**contempt**, i.e. thinking in one's heart things like, “Just look at that Christian; he thinks he is so right, but he is so wrong!” Or something like, “That Christian should not have so much influence. I know so much more than that Christian does,” or, “I certainly do not recognize that brother as an elder”—**railing**, i.e. speaking openly to others, using the same contemptible thoughts just mentioned above to others—**unforgiving**, i.e. taking into account a wrong suffered, rather than covering it by love—**irreconcilable**, i.e. refusing to make things right with a brother, even when that brother apologizes. All these things are just as evil in God's eyes as the awful physical sins of the flesh as fornication, adultery, theft, drunkenness, etc. Such boasting turns a separated Christian into a carnal and soulical Christian.

This same evil, of course, is also manifested in the hearts of those who believe they are the only true Church in a locality, simply because they believe other Churches are not as spiritual as they are. They end up boasting that they are more committed to God, that they are more submitted to God, that they are more obedient to God, that they are more pure than the other Churches, or that they are more pleasing to God than other Churches, so much so that they believe they are the true Church and the other is not. Or they might believe that they have the presence of Christ and the other Churches do not.

So we can see how such a principle of unity lends itself to sin and empty boasting which, in turn, leads to strife and further boasting, which then leads to further separation from other believers, and then, ultimately and unfortunately, to a multitude of divisions, each one thinking they are purer than the others, and so are the only true ones manifesting the unity of God upon earth. And this is exactly what happened to those who followed Darby's view of unity.

In fact, a few years after our brother Darby first wrote about the need for separation from evil resulting from the teachings of Benjamin Newton, some of brother Darby's closest supporters were soon rejected because they would not acquiesce to certain teachings made by Darby that ironically were quite similar to those teachings espoused by Benjamin Newton. They were being consistent, but because he was blind to his own deficiencies and because his followers almost viewed him as infallible, those close supporters who questioned Darby had to be

rejected, even though they were objecting to the same kernel of evil that Darby had previously objected to in Newton's teaching. What happened to the importance of separation from evil?

Henry Groves explains it all in his book on Darbyism. It is a sad affair.

"It was, as we have seen, about twenty years ago that Mr. Darby commenced his attack on Mr. Newton on the ground of heresy, and now we find two of his leading followers, Mr. Dorman and Captain Percy Hall, leaving him for holding views which they regard as identically the same. [A footnote at this point said this:] Captain Hall, writing of Mr. Darby's views, says, "So like are they to Mr. Newton's doctrines, that even had they not been as bad in themselves as I judge them to be, I should be quite unable to maintain the place of what is called testimony against Mr. Newton while connected with those who hold what I think to be as bad." We hope our brother will soon be led out of his testimony as against Mr. Newton or anyone else, into a simple testimony for Christ, which would clear his path of many difficulties that seem still to encompass it."³⁰

"His own discipline, righteously carried out, would at once have excommunicated not only him, but all those who maintained fellowship with him."³¹

"He [Darby] had frequently been spoken to by those of his followers who had courage to do so, on the similarity between his views and those held formerly by Mr. Newton. This was a subject spoken on at a meeting in Portsmouth some few years back, when Mr. D. replied, that those who could form such a comparison, were either "fools or knaves" Mr. Dorman tells us how again and again he brought the subject before him, and he seems at one time to have received "assurances of his willingness to correct any faulty expressions in the writings complained of "; but whatever promises may have been held out, by Mr. Darby, they were not to be realized. Strong representations had been made to him by others while abroad as to the painful effects his teachings had had on the minds of many in fellowship with him, but he returns to London from the continent, and rather than retract or alter anything he had written he determines to leave his party if necessary. This they could not allow. The result was that the whole question was hushed up, there was no examination, no retraction, and the doctrines in question virtually received the sanction of the leaders of the party...He had become a necessity to his followers, and they could not lose him; and the threat of leaving them not only led them to leave the matter uninvestigated, but to endorse the doctrines advocated, for "they had not found any thing in the writings referred to which had affected their own consciences." Thus have the London gatherings of the party given their sanction to that, for

³⁰ Henry Groves, *Darbyism: Its Rise and Development, and a Review of "The Bethesda Question"* (Houlston & Wright, London, c.1866) pg. 71

³¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 72

which these eighteen years they have been pursuing their brethren with “fire and sword.” **The question evidently is not, what is the doctrine, but who teaches it.** We commend the following extract from Mr. Dorman's Pamphlet...to the consideration of our readers.”³²

“The living, inexorable law of discipline which guards the grounds of fellowship of all who are especially associated with him, took its rise eighteen years ago in the rigid exclusion of the one doctrine; and it will be hard to show how it can be righteously maintained, in conjunction with the acceptance and maintenance of the other. At any rate it is impossible for me to regard any longer this law of exclusion as having anything whatever to do with purity of doctrine: on which ground it was at first ostensibly inaugurated. The brethren κατ’ ἐξοχὴν have now, strange to say it, completed a circle. Eighteen or nineteen years ago their polity and position were entirely remodeled on the ground of separation from “Bethesda” on account of alleged laxity in dealing with false doctrine. They are now themselves in a position to be separated from on the score of the reception and sanction of false doctrine amongst themselves;—and that not on some other point of Christian truth, but on the very point from which what they condemned arose.”³³

This Greek phrase, κατ’ ἐξοχὴν, in the quote above was taken from Acts 25:23, along with the Greek word for men. It was translated in the KJV as, *principle men*, and Darby translated it in his version as *men of distinction*. Our brother Dorman was referencing the fact that the brethren, according to the most prominent men within their circle in London, have now condoned what they once condemned.

In any case, this short quotation shows how the principle of separation from evil as put into practice by brother Darby and those with him, all for the purpose of maintaining the unity of the Spirit, was detrimental to the true unity of the Spirit for it was wielded by Christians that were still in need of sanctification from evil within themselves. Thus, because Christians are not at all times spiritual, because every Christian’s spirit soul and body is in need of sanctification by the Lord, some will use the principle of separation from evil more narrowly than others, some to one degree, and others to another. This has always been the case. It was even happening in the early Church. Paul addresses this fact in his epistle to Romans where some Christians were separating from evil to one degree and others to a different degree. And those who separated to what they

³² Ibid., pg. 83-84

³³ Ibid., pg. 85

perceived as evil judged those who did not agree, and those who did not agree held the others in contempt.

Romans 14:2-10 One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. ³ Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One man regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived *again*, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰ **But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?** For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. NASB

And so, because brother Darby's theory of unity, in many ways, was founded upon the same principle that underlie the theory of salvation by works, it produced a self-inflated view of oneself whenever that separation occurred; and, because the system of unity was based upon a man-made theory of separation, whenever a separation was challenged as being unjust or inconsistent, all kinds of human rationalizations would occur, for if one ever admitted the separation was a mistake, the admission would undermine their entire system. And so this is exactly what happened.

After the brethren refused to judge the false views of brother Darby, the system continued to gain steam, becoming narrower and narrower, resulting in more and more divisions, with each new division or separation thinking they were the true ones preserving the unity of the Spirit, while the other were not.

It even eventually reached one of the closest brothers to J. N. Darby, who followed "brethren" principles even before our brother Darby ever did. The story unfolded as follows.

Edward Cronin, who was one of the original brethren in Dublin, was excommunicated by this narrowing mindset of self-righteousness, because he broke bread with some brethren in Ryde, whom others felt

were not submissive to the London Central Meeting, and so was deemed evil. It was a complicated situation, but the end result was that one of the very first brothers who was led by the Holy Spirit to gather together in simplicity in the name of the Lord in Dublin became ostracized by the very brethren who were helped by his faithful labour and witness over the years. This decision later developed into more “separations” where one division in the Assembly in Ramsgate eventually led to more separations and divisions among many other Assemblies, resulting in those who sided with Darby, and others who sided with one by the name of William Kelly.

Eventually, this false theory of “separation from evil” as a basis for preserving the unity of the Spirit, even reached the shores of Canada and America, where disagreements on doctrines, not even having to do with any essential of the Faith, led to division after division as each Assembly took sides in different matters. The excommunication of F. W. Grant was one such example of this.

William Neatby in speaking of all these ultimate divisions concluded with this observation. He wrote—

“I have not spoken of all the divisions. The secession of Mr. S. O. Guff and his supporters within Darby's life-time was perhaps the most important of the lesser schisms. The Cluffites had anticipated the Stuartites and Grantites in dropping the Bethesda discipline. Mr. Cluffs divergence for Darbyism was doctrinal, and connected itself with some phase of the so-called “higher life” teaching... At any rate, [enough] has been said to amply illustrate the disintegration of the system. A certain Brother, meeting a friend of former days after the great division of 1881, put the caustic question, “To what section of the disorganisation do you belong?” He can little have thought how much additional force the sarcasm was destined to gain within the next ten years... While the wiser sort are awaking to a perception that the action of their principles has now made Darbyism a spectacle to Christendom, **others are so infatuated that every fresh disruption is hailed as another step in the path of sanctity**; and by the time that the number of their sects is literally according to the number of their cities, it is likely that some will see in the perfection of dissolution only the summit of their “path of testimony.”

“Let us,” says Mr. John James, a Montreal Brother, look at ourselves:—”Some say I am of J. N. D., others I am of W. K., “Some say I am of J. B. S., others I am of C. E. S., “Some say I am of A. P. C., others I am of F. W. G., “Some say I am of F. E. R., others I am of W. J. L”... He quotes from Mr. Grant: **“Our shame is public. It requires no spirituality to see that exactly in that which we have professedly sought we have failed most signally. ‘The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ is just most surely what we have not kept.”** Mr.

Grant's own efforts to apply some remedy to these scandals—even if we judge the efforts directed from an imperfect stand-point—surely deserve the recognition of all who have the welfare of the Church of Christ at heart.”³⁴

All this is the unfortunate fruit of brother Darby's theory of “separation from evil.” Brother after brother was boasting in their own correctness and sanctity and brother after brother was boasting in man, whether it is this certain leader of distinction with three initials, or that certain leader with three initials.

And this is not to say that those Churches who do not hold to this separation from evil as a basis for unity fared any better—all we need to do is to look at all the denominations in the world, and, indeed, even among many of those brethren who do not hold to our brother Darby's theory of separation from evil, but, rather, still hold to those New Testament Assembly principles practiced first by those early brethren in Dublin, look to all the strife that has arisen in their midst also (although such strife for the most part remains local and not between Assemblies across a wide geographical area like with those who followed Darby).

Nevertheless, even though divisiveness plagues almost any Church, one cannot deny that Darby's theory of separation from evil as a basis for the unity of the Spirit bore the carnal fruit of self-righteousness and division in their midst—division within division within division, each one believing they were more separated from evil than the others and so more spiritual and sanctified before God! Such is the problem when we blindly accept a false premise from Scripture. If it is not based upon Scripture, our old religious self takes over and inevitably leads us into empty boasting and multiple divisions.

But, beloved, when we truly understand the real principle of God's unity, i.e. the blood of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, and, indeed, the life of Christ within us, there is nothing to boast about, save in the work of God's Only-Begotten Son! There is no one left to boast in, save the Man Christ Jesus!

So, if this is true, let us now examine in greater detail the true basis of God's unity, which is found in none other than Christ Jesus our LORD and His precious work upon the cross. Let us look to Him so that we may

³⁴ William Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1901) pg. 322-323

all be humbled before Him and give Him the glory and praise He deserves! Amen.

We will first examine God's true principle of unity within the Godhead, for, in looking to God unity in order to explain our unity, our brother Darby was not wrong. We should always judge all things from the perspective of the Blessed Trinity. The problem was not that he began with God; the problem was that our brother Darby did not understand the true principle of unity with the Godhead! In this, he misled the saints.

Then after we examine the true nature of God's unity, we will then examine how the unity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit applies to our keeping the unity of the Spirit within the Church.

God's True Principle of Unity within the Godhead

John 17:20-23 “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹ **that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us**; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. ²² “And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; **that they may be one, just as We are one;** ²³ **I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.** NASB

As we said at the end of the last chapter, there is one aspect of our brother Darby's teaching in regard to the unity of the Spirit that is true and biblical; it is that our unity is based upon God's nature. (Darby simply misunderstood the nature of God and the basis of the unity within the Blessed Trinity.) And so it is true that our unity is based upon God's unity, as the apostle John reveals in John 17:20-23. Indeed, all things are rooted in the very nature, character and purpose of God. As such, this truth reveals why it is so important to understand the true nature of the Godhead, which means having a true and proper understanding of the Blessed Trinity.

Many times, false conclusions held by Christians are the result of false thoughts regarding the true Trinitarian nature of the Godhead. It was so with our brother Darby. It is not that he was heretical; he simply did not fully understand (or if he did understand) did not faithfully bear witness to the processional nature of the Godhead as revealed in Scripture and affirmed in the Historic Christian Faith from the Nicene Creed (325 AD) to the London Confession of Faith (1646 AD).

If our brother understood the true processional and consubstantial nature of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, he never would have stated that “the great, though simple, principle, flowing from the very nature of God [is] that separation from evil is **His** principle of unity.” This is simply a false assertion and premise. As we already briefly mentioned, separation from evil has never been the principle of His unity, meaning the eternal and perfect communion of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

This is why the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity is so important to the spiritual well-being of the Christian and the spiritual health of an

Assembly. This is also why the enemy of our souls wishes to convince the Christian that the Trinity is a mystery that one cannot possibly understand this side of heaven. That is patently false. The doctrine of the Trinity is the most important doctrine of the entire Bible and should be understood by every Christian to the depths of their being, for it will protect us from untold error and misunderstanding.

As such, to lay a basis for this chapter, let me provide a brief excerpt from *Understanding the Trinity*, regarding this truth, for without the proper understanding of the Trinity we will never fully understand the true principle of God's unity.

“A common statement heard among many Christians today is that the Trinity is a mystery, which cannot possibly be understood with our finite minds. We will confess that it is one of the most important doctrines of the Bible, but because we think finite minds cannot possibly understand the doctrine, we put it in the back corners of our minds where it slowly gathers dust. This is doing irreparable harm to the faith of many Christians and is not the result of any biblical teaching, but the result of the subtle distraction of the enemy.

Belief that the Trinity is a mystery causes one to not even take time to try to understand the doctrine. Why take time studying something which no one can ever understand? However, nowhere does Scripture tell us that the Trinity is a mystery, not in the biblical sense of mystery, nor in the modern definition of the word. In fact, the word mystery in the Bible, which is the translation of the Greek word “*musterion*,” does not mean something which is beyond understanding, but simply means a secret, which having been hidden, is now revealed to the one illuminated, i.e. Christians.

So even if the Bible did call the Trinity a mystery it would only be saying it was unknown to the one not illuminated, i.e. the one who is not a Christian. A Christian would still be expected to understand it. That leaves us with the modern definition of the word mystery.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary the word “mystery”

means “something that ...baffles or eludes the understanding,”³⁵ and it is this definition of the word, which fills the minds of many Christians when contemplating the Trinity. As an example, in responding to a question about the Trinity the other day, a well-known Evangelical preacher stated that the Trinity is a mystery which cannot possibly be understood this side of heaven. (This is not to imply there is not a side of God, which is beyond our knowledge. God is omniscient and we are finite. There is a side to God, which will always be above us. But as to how our God is Triune – how one can be three, and three can be one – Scripture never tells us it is a mystery.)

Trinitarian theology is given scant attention in Bible Colleges and Seminaries, and little mention in Sunday Schools and/or Evangelical Churches. (May it never be in our Assemblies.) It seems that we have developed a sort of Trinitarian amnesia. For one to declare that the Trinity is a mystery which cannot possibly be understood is to contradict Scripture which states –

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” **Rom. 1:20.**

Consequently, to declare that the Trinity cannot be known is to make God specious, because it makes God reveal something that cannot possibly be understood. On the contrary, what God reveals can always be understood and must be understood. The Trinity is the basis of all our understanding of God. If we would know God (Jn. 17:3), then we must understand the Trinity. Apart from the Trinity, one cannot fully understand the ways of God. Apart from the Trinity, one cannot fully understand salvation or sanctification. The Trinity is the basis of all of our spiritual understanding of God. Indeed, it is a lack of this understanding that has caused many Christians to be drawn into apostasy and heresy. If Christians really understood the Trinity down to the very depths of their beings, it would become a bastion of truth that would repel all attacks of apostasy and error.

Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity should not be a “mystery” in the corner recesses of our mind where it slowly gathers dust, but instead, a

³⁵ *American Heritage Dictionary, Second Edition*, (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA), 1976, pg. 826

revealed Truth sparkling like a multifaceted diamond at the forefront of our minds with all its glory and majesty.

That being said, though, it should not surprise us that in these last days the doctrine of the Trinity is ignored and misunderstood. We are engaged in a spiritual warfare. Satan does not want us to understand God because he desires to imitate and be like God (Isa. 14:14). Yet, as we know, he cannot be like God, *and so he must “mystify” the Godhead in order to substitute his own concept of godhead, and so deceive.*

Within the Godhead, or Divine Being, subsist Three Persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is of none and is thus known as unbegotten, the Son is of the Father and is thus begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son and is thus spirated. This is who God is. There is an eternal movement within the Three Persons. This movement is what unifies them and makes them One. Satan cannot imitate this. He does not have the ability to begat an only-begotten son as the Father has eternally begotten His Son. And so, if he is to make himself out to be God, he must change our perception of the nature of God. This is why there have always been heretical views on the nature of God. God exists as a triunity of Persons. They are distinct, but not separate. There is only one Divine Being, not three beings. Satan as an angelic being does not exist in that way...”³⁶

The council of Nicaea said it this way:

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all time, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became Man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended unto the heavens and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and cometh again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver,

³⁶ B. P. Harris, *Understanding the Trinity: An Encouragement to Abide in the Doctrine in both Faith and Practice* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2006) pg. 8-10

that proceeded from the Father, who with Father and Son is worshipped together.³⁷

“...This is the Historic Christian Faith that has always been confessed and to which we whole heartily agree. Yet many Christians today do not understand this truth. They do not understand that there is only one Divine Being. They believe “Person” means “individual” or “being” and thus in reality hold to a tritheistic viewpoint. They believe there are three Beings in the Godhead, or others, in reaction to such a viewpoint, hold to a modalistic viewpoint of God – while believing that there is but one Divine Being, they believe God reveals himself, not in three subsistences or modes of existence, but in three stages of manifestation – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Still others, rejecting both extremes, affirm that there are Three Persons and one Divine Being, but they deny the intra-Trinitarian activities between the Three Persons, and so do not believe in the eternal begottenness of the Son or the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.

This viewpoint is one of the most subtle variations of the truth, for with denial of procession, one is left with Three Persons who cannot possibly be consubstantial. They become Three Persons who are not just distinct, but are actually separate. If the Persons are “separate,” they can only be of “*similar substance*” rather than of the “*same substance*.”

This Semi-Arian viewpoint was condemned at Nicaea and was considered heretical, yet this is exactly the viewpoint that needs to be prevalent in the last days if Satan is going to imitate the Trinity – Three separate Persons who are seen as one in “purpose” but not in “substance.” – Three Persons who are co-eternal, without the intra-Trinitarian activity of begottenness and procession.

This tactic of Satan can only be accomplished by “mystifying” and distorting Trinitarian truth. He cannot have Christians spending much time seeking to understand the true nature of God. He needs to hinder the Christians pursuit of the truth, and he has accomplished this by adding the word “mystery” to Trinitarian Theology. *This is his masterful stroke.*

If Christians believe the Trinity is a mystery that cannot be understood,

³⁷ Ibid., pg. 12

then why even bother? However, as we said before, Scripture nowhere declares the Trinity is a mystery in either of its definitions. Satan desires us to think the Trinity is a mystery, because in that way he can keep our minds befuddled of the Truth and, as we will see later in the book, keep us devoid of spiritual truth, and robbed of the grace and peace that should be ours through the knowledge of our God (II Pet. 1:2).”³⁸

So with that being said, what is the true basis of the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Simply put, the true basis of God’s unity is the possession of one Divine Substance, which theologically has been defined as “consubstantiality,” and historically has been defined as “*homoousios*— the same substance, as can be seen in the Nicene Creed above. Thus the basis of their unity is that they all possess the one and same Divine Substance, sometimes called the Essence of the Godhead, all without division, separation or diminution. I know this is not the place to delve deeply into this, but let me provide another short excerpt on this truth before we continue.

“Essence [is] defined by three qualities: substantial, communicating, and consubstantial. What this is telling us is that the essence of God is first of all substantial – it has substance. As to what that substance is, no one knows and perhaps no one will ever know...The closest, perhaps, we come to understanding the substance of God is that He is spiritual. John 4:24 says, “...God is Spirit...”

Secondly, [we see] the essence of God has always been communicated. The substance of God has never existed simply as His own. It has always been communicated. There never was a time that the Son and the Holy Spirit did not possess the same substance as the Father. Therefore, it has always been communicated.

John 5:26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. KJV

Colossians 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. KJV

Thirdly, because the substance of the Father has always been communicated without division or diminution, it is a consubstantial substance. The substance that the Son and the Holy Spirit possess is the

³⁸ Ibid., pg. 13-14

same substance the Father possesses...It is important to understand that it is not a divided substance, in the sense that the Father communicated another substance like unto His own to the Son and the Holy Spirit. No, they all possess the one and the same substance simultaneously without division or diminution.”³⁹

John 10:30 I and *my* Father are one. KJV

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. KJV

Acts 5:3-4 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart **to lie to the Holy Ghost**, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? ⁴ Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast **not lied unto men, but unto God**.

All Three Persons are coinherent in each other because they are all consubstantial. Because the Father's substance is characterized by omnipresence, which means He is infinite or everywhere, so all who are consubstantial with Him, or those who possess the same substance, must be infinite or everywhere. Consequently, all Three Persons coinhere within each other because all three are everywhere.

Jeremiah 23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD. KJV

John 14:10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. KJV

Psalms 139:7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? NKJV

And to put it in finite understanding, one must realize that the only way for something to be completely within another thing is for them both to entirely possess the same space at the same time. This is coinherence. All Three Persons are coinherent because all Three Persons are consubstantial or infinite, equal, and eternal...”⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., pg. 262-263

⁴⁰ Ibid., pg. 264-265

[Finally,] this consubstantial coinherence brings us to **the last quality of unity**, and that last quality is communion. The Three Persons of the Godhead are a Trinity in unity because they all possess the same attributes [each possessing the same substance], and therefore exist in perfect communion.”⁴¹

John 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father? KJV

Hebrews 1:3 Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. KJV

Rom 5:5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. KJV

Proverbs 8:22-23, 30 The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.²³ I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.³⁰ Then I was by him, *as* one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him. KJV

II Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen. NKJV

“Since the Three Persons of the Godhead are all consubstantial, they all possess the same attributes, and thus are not only eternal, but are also omnipresent and thus fully coinhere in each other. This coinherence results in a perfect communion, because through their coinherence they are also omniscient and, consequently, fully know each other. This omniscience allows them to move in perfect harmony because they each fully love one another **and thus respond in perfect union with one another**. The Father loves the Son perfectly, and the Son responds in perfect love and obedience, while the Holy Spirit affirms such love **in perfect unity**.

So we see the unity of the Godhead through consubstantiality, coinherence, and communion. These three qualities reveal to us the perfect oneness and unity of God.⁴² (See Fig. 1 below)

⁴¹ Ibid., pg. 250-251

⁴² Ibid. pg. 252

Fig. 1—The Unity of the Godhead

	PERSON	ACTIVITY	UNITY
ESSENCE	Substantial	Communicating	Consubstantial
NATURE	Subsistential	Giving	Coinherent
BEING	Attributal	Imparting	Communional

So now we see the true principle of God’s Unity. It is that the Three Persons possession of one and the same substance—which bespeaks the consubstantiality within the Godhead. All Three Persons are *homoousios*. That is the principle of God’s unity, not separation from evil, for they were in perfect oneness, dwelling in perfect unity, before evil ever existed.

John 17:5 “And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. NASB

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*. KJV

John 17:21 that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. KJV

Separation from evil was never an ingredient to their unity, for there was no evil to separate from in eternity!

As such, since we are to be one as the Godhead is one, separation from evil is not a basis for our unity within the Church. The apostle John tells us that Jesus prayed that we might be one, **even as they were one**, and they never were **one** by separation from evil!

John 17:22-23 And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; **that they may be one, just as We are one;** ²³I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. NASB

Consubstantiality, Coinherence, and Communion is, and eternally has been, the basis and the principle of God’s Unity. So, since Jesus prays

that we might be one, even as they were one, let's look a little closer to these verse in John chapter 17 to see what God's true principle of unity is for His Church.

God's True Principle of Unity for the Church

Our Lord addresses the God's true principle of unity for the Church in John chapter 17. The first portion of His prayer, which is commonly called His High Priestly prayer, is found in verses 1-10; it lays the basis for the rest of His prayer. It speaks of His eternal glory, the completion of the work that was given to Him to accomplish upon earth, and the ones for whom He is praying, after which He prays for the well-being and the unity of His disciples and those who will believe through in Him their word, which we know, of course, is the Church. This is found in the rest of His High Priestly Prayer from verse 11 through the end of the chapter.

In this second half of His prayer, He prays for their unity from three different perspectives. First, He prays that the Father will keep them one in the Father's Name (John 17:11); secondly, He prays that they may be one by the Father sanctifying them in Truth (John 17:17-21); and finally, He prays they may be made one by glory, the glory He received from the Father, and the glory which He gave to His disciples (John 17:22).

All three of these perspectives point revolve around the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It was the Son who gave us the Name of the Father in its fullness of meaning. It was the Son who sanctified Himself, so His believers could be sanctified in Truth. And it was the glory of the Son, whereby we are made one. Or to look at it another way, we could say the first bespeaks oneness or unity in relation to a "Name," the second bespeaks oneness or unity in relation to "Truth," and the third bespeaks oneness or unity in relation to "Glory." Either way the chapter culminates in the Glory of His life, whereby God makes us one.

And so, let us follow the Lord's thought through His High Priestly prayer and see how it reveals God's true principle of unity for the Church. However, before we begin, we must first understand one thing regarding the Greek language and the Greek future perfect tense as used in this chapter by the apostle John, who uses it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to emphasize certain truths in the chapter. So let us first briefly examine this.

Some Grammatical Considerations

In this passage in the Gospel of John, the Lord is praying in light of His coming death, burial, resurrection and then, His subsequent ascension

back to heaven. As such, he prays in some instances as if all this had already occurred, even though at the time of this prayer He had not yet even been delivered over to Pilate for crucifixion! The Holy Spirit reveals this to us by the underlying tense of certain Greek verbs.

For example, in verse 11 our Lord states that He is “no longer in the world,” but, of course, we know that did not happen in reality until more than a month later; and yet the Lord speaks in the present as if it had already happened! In the Greek language this is not an uncommon way of speaking, and is commonly conveyed by the present tense of the Greek verb “to be,” εἶμι.

John 17:11 “Now **I am** no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are*. NKJV

Thus we see that Jesus is referring to a future event, even though John uses a present tense of the verb to be. In Greek, this use of the present tense is sometimes called a futuristic present. Some may wonder why the Greek language uses such a thing. The answer is to provide emphasis and the certainty of the occurrence to the reader.

For example, in Mark 9:31, this same technique is used when Jesus says that “the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men.” He uses the present tense and not a future tense which would have read that “the Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men.” Obviously, when Jesus declared that the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, it had not yet occurred (like our example in John 17:11), but because Jesus knew the certainty of that occurrence, and his desire to emphasize the surety of that occurrence, the Holy Spirit uses this futuristic use of the present tense to convey that fact. This use of the tense is not unique to the Greek language; even in English we sometimes use the present tense the same way.

For example, if a student (who was away at college and who had worked hard in his studies all year) was excited about the beginning of summer vacation, might say this to a friend on the last day of school, “I am out of here!” Now, obviously the student would not yet be “out of there” when making that declaration. There still might be a class or two to take before the student was really “out of there.” But the student was so excited about having a break from studies and being able to go home for summer vacation that he spoke to his friend about that future event as if it had already occurred as his way to emphasize the certainty of that occasion.

And so the Greek language sometimes operated the same way. But, not only that, the Greek language sometimes also employed the perfect tense in the same way. In other words, sometimes a thing that had not yet occurred was spoken as if it has already happened in the past. Robertson in his Greek Grammar calls this the “prophetic-perfect.”

“*Futuristic Present Perfect*. Since the present so often occurs in a futuristic sense, it is not strange if we find the present perfect so used also = future perfect. **This proleptical use of the perfect may be illustrated by** δεδόξασμαι (Jo. 17:10), δέδωκα (17:22), τετέλεσται (19:28), σέσηπεν and γέγονεν and κατίωται in Jas. 5:2 f. (cf. ἔσται και φάγεται). **This use is sometimes called “prophetic-perfect.”**”⁴³

This additional use of a Greek tense in this way is also important to note when we come to verse 22, which speaks of our oneness with each other. Our Lord prays—

John 17:22 “And the glory which Thou hast given (δέδωκάς) Me I have given (δέδωκα) to them; that they may be one, just as We are one. NASB

The Greek word “to give,” δίδωμι, is found in the perfect tense, inflected as δέδωκάς, a 2nd person perfect indicative active verb, and the Greek verb, δέδωκα is inflected as a 1st person perfect indicative active verb. And yet, even though they are perfects, it seems John is using them as futuristic perfect verbs (just as Robertson also indicated above) for reasons we will shortly examine.

But, before we examine this possible usage of the futuristic perfect, perhaps, it would only be fair to mention as a brief aside that some believe John intended them to be taken as regular perfects. And, if that is so, one must ask as to what kind of glory the Lord was referring to when He says the glory had already been given to Him, and that He had already given that glory to His disciples.

The answer is that some believe the glory refers to the power to perform miracles, which the apostles had already been given, and which John already referred to as glory in John 11:40. But, contextually our Lord is speaking of all believers (Jn. 17:20) and all have not been given that glory, i.e. the power to perform miracles. For that reason, it seems unlikely that is what our Lord is referring to when He mentions glory.

⁴³ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Hodder & Stoughton, New York, 1914) Pg. 898

Others believe it could refer to the glorious gospel of God (cf. I Timothy 1:11), but that does not seem likely either, since the gospel was not yet given to them in its fullness until after the Lord's resurrection—a future event. And since we are briefly discussing how some view these verbs as ordinary perfects, and not as futuristic perfects, we cannot use a necessary future event in our considerations (cf. Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-48). Thus it seems unlikely that this glory could yet refer to the glorious Gospel. Besides, it would be difficult to understand as to how the message of the Gospel would result in oneness. From the very beginning different brethren preached different versions of what the Gospel meant, so much so that Paul had to pronounce an anathema on one who preached a different Gospel.

The only other possibility is that some think it might refer to the eternal glory that the Son ever had with the Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:5). But this seems, unlikely because that eternal glory was the glory of the Only-Begotten Son of God, being very God of very God, and so, being the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who was consubstantial with the Father, that “glory” of the Son could never be given to the disciples.

So if the glory cannot refer to any of these possibilities, it leaves us with a *prophetic-perfect*, bespeaking the future glory of Christ, which was His was about to be given to Him by the Father, but which is spoken of as being already received for emphasis and because of its certainty.

Consequently, it seems most references to the Father glorifying the Son in this prayer must refer to that incarnational glory the Son of God was about to receive from the Father, in His death, burial and resurrection, and when He ascends to the right hand of God on high, and not to His eternal glory, which He always had with the Father before the world was. Now that eternal glory our Lord does refer to in verse five. He asks to now be glorified with the Father by the eternal glory. In other words, in verse five, He is asking the Father to now make known that He truly was the Son of God and not just an ordinary man by that eternal glory that was hidden from most in His incarnation by His emptying himself of the outward effulgence of that glory, when He took on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7); but that glory was always His. He never lost it. It was the glory that Peter, James and John saw upon the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-32), and which glory John also mentions in the first chapter of his Gospel (see John 1:14). That eternal glory was eternally given to the Son in His eternal begetting from the Father. There never was a time when that glory was not His, for there never was a time when the Son

was not. It was His eternal possession, for it was the glory of the undivided substance of God, and so that glory could not be given to anyone else, which means it was not the glory that the Son asked the Father to give to his disciples.

In fact, this part of our Lord's prayer in verse 5 was answered immediately by His Father. We see this when our Lord entered into the garden of Gethsemane, wherein the glory and beauties of the Eternal Son "began" to shine forth on that dark night before His crucifixion. Indeed, this may be what is behind John inclusion of what happened in the garden of Gethsemane in regard to our Lord's arrest, an occurrence not found in the Synoptic Gospels.

John 18:6-8 As soon then as he had said unto them, **I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.** ⁷ Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. ⁸ Jesus answered, I have told you that **I am he**: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way. KJV

Why did they fall back? Jamieson, Fausset and Brown say this in regard to this verse:

"As soon then as he had said unto them, I am [He], they went backward—recoiled, and fell to the ground—struck down by a power such as that which smote Saul of Tarsus and his companions to the earth (Ac 26:14). It was the glorious effulgence of the majesty of Christ which overpowered them." ⁴⁴

William Kelly also has a wonderful comment on this verse.

"John tells us (chap. xviii.) what no other gospel does, that when the band came to take Jesus, led by one who knew too well the spot where His heart had so often, poured itself out to the Father, at once they went backward, and fell to the ground. Do you suppose Matthew let it slip, or that Mark and Luke never heard of it? Is it conceivable that a fact so notorious—the very world being the objects of the divine power that cast them prostrate to the ground—could be hidden from, or forgotten by, friends or foes? Or if even men (not to speak of the Spirit's power) would forget such a thing, did the rest think it too slight for their mention? All such suppositions are preposterous. The true explanation is, that the gospels are written with divine design, and that here, as everywhere, John records a fact which falls in with the Spirit's object in his gospel. Did these men come to seize Jesus? He was going to be a prisoner, and to die; in the one case, as much as in the other, He would prove it was not of man's constraint, but of His own will and in obedience to His Father's. He was a willing prisoner, and a

⁴⁴ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset; David Brown, *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible Vol. II* (S. S. Scranton and Company, Hartford, 1871) pg. 161

willing victim. If none could take His life unless He laid it down, so none could take Him prisoner unless He gave Himself up. Nor was it simply that He could ask His Father for twelve legions of angels, as He says in Matthew; but, in John, did He want angels? They might and did ascend and descend on Him as Son of man; but He had only to speak, and it was done. **He is God.** The moment He said, “I am he,” without lifting a finger, or even audibly expressing a desire, they fell to the ground. Could this scene be suitably given by any other than John? Could he leave it out **who presents his Master as the Son and the Word who was God?**”⁴⁵

So with all this as basis, let us now continue and look at the word glory as it is used in its verbal and nominal form in this prayer, either as referring to His eternal glory, and/or His incarnational glory.

The First Part—John 17: 1-10

John 17:1-3 begins as follows—

Verses 1-3—These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: ² As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. ³ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. KJV

Our Lord first speaks of glorifying His Father by His death upon the cross, which is referred to as the “hour is come,” which in the NASB is rendered the “hour has come.” He speaks of this future event with the perfect tense of the Greek verb ἐλήλυθεν (has come)—another use of a *prophetic-perfect*. He speaks of that glory in the framework of the hour having already come. Throughout John’s Gospel that hour referred to our Lord’s death upon the cross.

John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that **His hour had come** that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. NASB

⁴⁵ William Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels*, 2nd edition (W.H. Broom, London, 1867) pg. 613-614

John 12:23-24 And Jesus answered them, saying, “**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**” ²⁴ “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; **but if it dies**, it bears much fruit. NASB

John 12:27-28, 32-33 Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, **save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.** ²⁸ “Father, glorify Thy name.” There came therefore a voice out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” ³² “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” ³³ But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. KJV

John 13:31 When therefore he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him;” ³² if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. NASB

Thus, that hour referred to our Lord’s death upon the cross that would come the next day, beginning with the sixth hour and ending at the ninth hour, at which time the Lord would bow His sacred head and die. It may not have necessarily referred to one literal hour; it could have referred to that specific portion of time (i.e. the sixth to ninth hour), but, if our Lord was referring to a literal hour, it would have then been the ninth hour during which He actually gave up the ghost (see Matt. 27:45-50). In any case, we are told that at that time, in that hour, the Son would be glorified by the Father.

Then in verse 4 we read—

Verse 4—I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. KJV

First, our Lord declares that His work has been finished, which would include such things, for example, as our Lord glorifying the Father on the earth by preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and by our Lord fulfilling Law in all righteousness, and by the working of miracles to God’s glory. It could also include Christ having glorified the Father on earth as the Son of Man by manifesting to the world the Father’s holiness, righteousness, goodness, justice, mercy, truth, wisdom, and every other one of His attributes. All these things refer to the Son glorifying the Father while on earth.

But some wonder how could Christ say He had finished the work the Father gave Him to do, before He was even crucified upon the cross, dying for the sins of the world, which was the primary reason for His

incarnation? Again, this shows the flexibility of the Greek language and could be another use of a Greek verb proleptically; this time the proleptical use of the Greek aorist tense. To a Greek reader this statement poses no problem for it simply emphasizes the present reality of a future event.

Next, in verse 5, Jesus prays—

Verse 5—And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. KJV

In this verse, the Lord is asking the Father to glorify Him with the glory He had with Him before the foundation of the world, before the world ever was, i.e. in eternity. In other words, He is now asking the Father to glorify Him at this moment by now making known to all that eternal glory through His death, burial and resurrection, and, ultimate exaltation.

In this light we see that “glory” bespeaks the outward manifestation of an inward reality. Throughout our Lord’s incarnation that glory, which was eternally His as the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, was veiled, so to speak, by His humanity.

In John 1:14, John speaks of this fact by comparing His incarnation to the Tabernacle. The word translated “dwelt,” in the phrase, “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” literally means to “tabernacle,” which, of course, reminds us of the Tabernacle in the Old Testament. And we know the Tabernacle contained the Holy of Holies, in which the glory of the Lord shone. But we also know that that glory was veiled to those without by the Tabernacle’s four coverings, the last covering being that of badger skins (see Ex. 26:13-14; 35:23).

This badger skin prophetically speaks to the fact that our Lord, in His incarnation, had emptied Himself of the outward manifestation of that eternal glory that He now refers to in His prayer. He veiled His eternal glory by coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, appearing in the form of a servant (see Rom. 8:3 and Phil. 2:6-8). Thus, this outermost covering of badger skins predicted His incarnation. It predicted that He would be one who had “no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him,” (Isa. 53:2 NASB) even though within that covering, so to speak, He was very God of very God!

So when Jesus asks the Father to now glorify Him with the glory that was His before the foundation of the world, He is asking that His Father

to now make known His true glory. This act of glorifying would include more than a simple unveiling of that eternal glory, but it would also include a fresh new glorification of the Son of Man as the Son of God, which means the one was based upon the other. It was a fresh new glorification by the Father, but it was rooted in His eternal glory as the Son of God.

Thus, in answer to our Lord's prayer, the Father now begins to make known to the world as to who the Son of Man really was in His death, burial, resurrection, and then, His ascension to His right hand of God in Heaven. For example, as we already briefly mentioned, it was made known when Jesus declared in the garden "I AM" (John 18:6). The manner of our Lord's death showed He was indeed, the true Light of the world. The God of the universe did this by turning the light of the day into darkness, thereby, physically showing men that they would dwell in darkness, if they did not choose to look with eyes of faith to Jesus, the Light of the world.

Even the way our Lord died with forgiveness and love upon His heart for all, rather than anger and hatred to those who crucified Him, showed forth who He really was, that He was no ordinary man but the Christ, the Eternal Son of God. Indeed, the Lord died in purity and sinlessness (unlike the two criminals who died with Him) with the full manifestation of that love of God His Father, a love which gave the Only-Begotten Son so that whosoever believed in Him might not perish but have eternal life.

And then when our Lord rose from the dead on the third day, the manner of His resurrection also showed forth His true glory. Scripture says He was "declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4 NASB). In all these things we see that the Father glorifying the "Son of Man" as being the eternal "Son of God."

It should be noted, however, He did not need this glory because somehow He lost that eternal glory in His incarnation, and so that the Father had to give it back to Him in time. No, no, the glory was His from eternity and, as such, He never lost it; nor, indeed, could He ever lose it, for it was the glory of One who possessed all the fullness of the Godhead. John referred to this intrinsic and eternal glory in John 1:14.

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. KJV

Consequently, since the Son was already eternally glorified, with the same glory as that of the Father, in His eternal generation, this desire of Jesus to now be glorified by the Father in time was a new glorification that was given to the Son in His incarnation. It was a new glorification for a perfect life of obedience, and perfect fulfilment of the Law, as well as the giving of His life as an atonement for sin. It affirmed to everyone that Jesus was, indeed, the Eternal Son of God, who became the Son of Man, by taking upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh, just as John said above—"the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us." It was a new glorification by the Father that allowed His eternal glory that He never lost to now be made manifest in its fullness. In other words, the incarnational glorification of the Son of Man, revealed the eternal glory of the Son of God.

Then, finally, the ultimate glory that was then given to Him in His incarnation was the glory of His exaltation to the right hand of God on High, showing for all time that this Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, the Only-Begotten Son of God from all eternity.

Peter and Luke both reference this glory given unto Him.

I Peter 1:20-21 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,²¹ Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, **and gave him glory**; that your faith and hope might be in God. KJV

Luke 24:26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and **to enter into his glory**? KJV

Now we come to the first reference in our Lord's prayer regarding our unity and the next reference in regard to glory (in its verbal form). It is found in verse 10, but within the overall context of verses 6-11.

Verses 6-11—I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.⁷ Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.⁸ For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.⁹ I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.¹⁰ And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.¹¹ And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine

own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. KJV

The context of these six verses speaks of the full revelation of the name, Father, in reference to the Son's procession out from the Father, as a final confirmation of what He said earlier in John 16: 28-30—

John 16:28-30 ²⁸ “**I came forth from the Father** and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”²⁹ His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!” ³⁰ “Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. **By this we believe that You came forth from God.**” NKJV

And which He had mentioned even earlier in John 8:42—

John 8:42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for **I proceeded forth** and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. KJV

He tells the Father that His disciples have finally come to understand His true processional nature of begottenness, which explains why the primary reason why the Father is known as Father, thereby showing forth the fullness of the revelation of the Father's Name. ⁴⁶

John 17:8 For the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received *them*, and truly understood that **I came forth from Thee**, and they believed that Thou didst send Me. NASB

It bespeaks the culmination of our Lord teaching to His disciples regarding this truth. All through His ministry Jesus repeatedly spoke to them regarding His personal relationship with God His Father. From the very beginning of His ministry He referred to Himself as the Only-Begotten, pointing to His eternal generation, His eternal begetting from God His Father (John 3:16). Early on He told them that the Father had given Him to have life in Himself, as the Father had life in Himself, which, of course, also bespeaks His being begotten from God the Father.

⁴⁶ If one wishes to understand more fully how this verse speaks of His eternal generation from the Father, please see the chapter entitled, “The Processional Verses in the Gospel of John,” in the book, *Understanding the Trinity: An Encouragement to Abide in the Doctrine in both Faith and Practice* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2006) pg. 196-202, freely available at www.silicabiblechapel.com.

John 5:26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son **to have life in himself.** KJV

He had received all things that were the Father's, which meant He eternally received that life from the Father, which He had in Himself, which could only mean He received that same and undivided Divine Substance of God, in that eternal and timeless generation. Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology*, once succinctly put it this way: "If the generation of the Son is a necessary act of the Father, so that it is impossible to conceive of Him as not generating, it naturally shares in the eternity of the Father. This does not mean, however, that it is an act that was completed in the far distant past, but rather that it is a timeless act, the act of an eternal present, an act always' continuing and yet ever completed."⁴⁷

Consequently, this *giving* to the Son, mentioned in John 5:26, must also refers to His eternal generation or procession of the Son from the Father. There never was a time when the Son did not have life in Himself, for this was an eternal act, and is the reason why He and the Father were one (John 10:30).

Because of this, and because He made this eternal relationship known to His disciples as the Only-Begotten Son of God the Father, as the one who was given to have life in Himself, just as the Father has life in Himself, as the one who proceeded forth, the one who eternally came forth out of the Father in eternity, and came from God to earth in time, Jesus now prays that the Father would keep them in this same revelatory Name.

Jesus made it known to His disciples that God the Father was known as Father, not because of us, not because of creation, not because He is the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9), but first and foremost because eternally He is the Father of an Only-Begotten Son! In that light and revelation of the Father's name, Jesus now introduces the first mention of His desire for our unity and oneness. Why? I think the answer is because procession brings life and life brings oneness or unity!

In our Lord's eternal generation, the Son was eternally given to have life in Himself, which was an eternal communication of the One and Divine Substance of God the Father, given without diminution, or division. It was an eternal act done before time was created, and so before there were

⁴⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1941) pg. 93

any moments where one thing might happen before another. In other words, there never was a moment when the Father ever existed without His Son. As such there never was a moment when the Son did not have life in Himself as the Father had life in Himself. It was an eternal communication of life in eternity.

Beloved, this is such an important doctrine; there is only One Divine Essence, which all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity eternally possess. The Father possess it, being unbegotten; the Son possesses it, being eternally begotten; and the Holy Spirit possesses it being eternally spirated. Thus the Son is consubstantial with the Father, as Jesus said in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." His procession results in Oneness, for in procession there is a communication of substance, and it takes having the one and same substance in order to be one, which means to be united. Without procession there is no unity.

The same is true of every believer. Our procession also results in oneness and unity and is why our Lord addresses this truth when He introduces His desire that His disciples be one as He and the Father are one. Every child of God is begotten of God, having been born of the Spirit (John 1:11-13; 3:5-6). This is analogous to the eternal generation of the Son with obvious limitations. So that just as the eternal begetting of the Son results in His oneness with the Father, so too, are temporal begetting of the Father in our being born again of the Spirit results in our oneness.

Now, we must be careful to realize that our begetting is not the same as the Son's begetting, and would be a complete error to ever say that it is! But it equally would be wrong (indeed, even heresy) to say the Son's begetting is like our begetting! It is not!

This is the error some make in regard to the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation. They view our begetting from God as the pattern for His begetting from the Father, and so presume that the doctrine teaches the Father precedes the Son. This is wrong thinking, based upon a false presupposition. It places man before God, which makes man into the archetype and the Son into the ectype. Beloved this is backwards. The Son is the Archetype and we are the ectype. Indeed, the Son is the Archetype of all creation. All things point to the Son and are understood through Him. All things do not point to man. As such, we must realize that our begetting from God is only a limited analogy given to us to help us understand certain truths, and so should never be stretched too far in application.

This is the same as with all types, parables and figures in Scripture; if one stretches them too far, one can be led into error, making false conclusions. So many people do this with certain parables and types given to us in Scripture. Our Lord never intended them to be taken as being analogous in every aspect and detail. They must always be understood within the fuller context of Scripture.

For example, consider what Paul said about Adam, that he was a type of Christ—"Him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14). There is much that can be learned from that type (e. g. Christ and His Church in light of Adam and Eve). But if one uses that revelation of Paul to justify every type of parallel or comparison, one will fall into error, let alone heresy.

For instance, some have concluded that since Adam is a type of Christ, it must mean that since Adam could sin, that Christ could have sinned. Nonsense! That is heresy. Christ was impeccable! He was very God of very God and God cannot sin. That is stretching the figure or type or analogy of Adam and Christ too far.

So we see we must be very careful in the use of types, parables and analogies. But if they are accepted as limited pictures of truth, they can be very helpful; otherwise the Holy Spirit would never have given them to us. (As such, how wonderful it is to appreciate such other types and figures of Christ like the "Ark" or the "Tabernacle in the Wilderness!")

In that light, and with that word of caution, we can begin to see and understand why our Lord spoke of our unity in the context of the Name of the Father. We see that the Son is begotten of the Father and that we are begotten of the Father also. How wonderful! But there that aspect of the analogy ends, for our Lord was begotten in eternity, and so had no beginning, whereas we were begotten in time and so had a beginning! Or take for instance this limitation of the analogy. He was begotten directly of the Father, and so is the Only-Begotten Son of God, the only one ever begotten in that manner! However, even though we are also begotten of God, we are not begotten of God directly, apart from our being born of the Spirit. That was not true of the eternal Son. The Holy Spirit was never involved with the Son's eternal begetting. He was begotten solely of the Father, the first Person of the Blessed Trinity.

But, on the other hand, we were never begotten of the Father apart from our being born again of the Spirit, which is our regeneration (Titus 3:5; John 3:5-7)! Our being born is an act of the First and Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, not just the First Person, as it is with the Son. Indeed, in

one sense, one could say the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity was also involved in the act of making us the children of God, for in our begetting we are at the same time baptized into His body of the Son—Eph. 5:30 KJV). We are born of God, be being born of the Spirit, and then baptized into the body of Christ—I Cor. 12:13).

Let us take one last example. In the Son's begottenness there was a communication of life as we have seen above. The same is true of us, except that His was the eternal communication of the One Divine Substance of God, and ours is not! However, the one wonderful aspect of this analogy that is true is that there is a communication of life in our being born of God and of the Spirit (John 1:13). The life that is communicated to us is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2)! We receive life in our new birth, but it is not the fullness of the Godhead as with the Son (Col. 2:9). That is the one substance of the Godhead possessed equally only by the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. But we do receive a fullness (John 1:16). It is the fullness of the Son Himself in us! John succinctly bespeaks this wonderful communication of life in his epistle, when he said, "He that has the Son has life" (I John 5:12)! In our new birth we received everlasting life (John 3:16)!

So we can now see that we must be very careful in any analogy that we not contradict or exceed what is written, especially in regard to this limited analogy of our being begotten of God the Father, which John first reveals in the first chapter of his Gospel in conjunction with the Son's eternal begetting from the Father which culminates in the text before us—John 17.

John 1:12-13 but as many as did receive him to them he gave authority to become sons of God -- to those believing in his name,¹³ who -- not of blood nor of a will of flesh, nor of a will of man but -- of God were begotten. **Young's Literal Translation**⁴⁸

Thus it is very important for us to stay within the parameters of Scripture and to not add to the Word of God in this analogy, for the Lord Jesus will shortly use this analogy to compare our oneness or unity with His Oneness and Unity (John 17:11). As such, in order for us to understand

⁴⁸ It should be noted that even though most translations of John 1:13 translate it as "born... of God," the Greek word that John uses is the very same Greek word used for the Son being begotten of God the Father, the Greek word γεννάω (see Heb. 1:5 and in the NASB I Jn. 5:18). As such, Young's translation brings this out and translates the word as begotten in John 1:13.

how we are one, just as they are One, we needed to understand this doctrine of the Father and His Only-Begotten Son, whose Unity or Oneness came from His eternal generation and eternal communication of life from God the Father because our oneness and unity with each other also comes from our begetting and reception of life from God the Father, in Christ Jesus, when we were born of the Spirit. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

So with this contextual understanding of John 17, let us continue our study and understand God’s principle of unity for the Church, which is rooted in the very unity of the Blessed Trinity. We will look at it from three perspectives—the Name of the Father given to the Son, the Sanctification of the Son, and the Glory of His Life. Let us begin with the verse we concluded with above, verse 11.

The Second Portion—John 17: 11-26

The Name of the Father—vs. 11-20

Verse 11-16—And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.¹² While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.¹³ And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.¹⁴ I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.¹⁵ I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. KJV

1) The Name – This portion of this prayer of our Lord in verse 11 should not be lightly esteemed. This is a holy desire of the Son. If we claim to honor the Son, then everything that is on His heart must be honored. And so the Lord prays to the Father that we might be one, even as they are one.

We have already discussed as to which Name is He referring, when He says, “Keep them in Thy Name.” He is speaking to the Father. And so, since the pronoun “Thy” is referring to God the Father, it must be a Name that belongs to the Father, but which is given to the Lord Jesus—so it couldn't be the name “Jesus,” and it couldn't be the name, or title “Christ,” because the name “Jesus,” or the title “Christ,” of course, never belonged to the Father. The only Name that could be given to the Son that was the Father's, is the Name “Father.”

Now, perhaps, I should pause and mention there is a variant reading in this text. If you read the KJV you may wonder why I said in the previous paragraph above that the Name was given to the Lord Jesus; you may wonder where in our Lord's High Priestly prayer does it say that. That phrase actually is found in the Nestle-Aland Greek Text, which is the same phrase also found in the Majority text. In both those texts it reads ὃ δέδωκάς μοι (**which** Thou hast given me).

John 17:11 “And I am no more in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, *the name which Thou hast given Me*, that they may be one, even as *We are*. NASB

But the King James Translators followed the Stephanus Greek text which reads: οὓς δέδωκάς μοι (**whom** thou hast given me). The difference is ὃ (which) is a relative pronoun in the dative case and is connected with “ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί” (in the name), while οὓς (whom) is a relative pronoun in the accusative case which is connected with αὐτοὺς (them).

So the King James says the Lord was praying about “those,” i.e. the disciples that were given to Him, whereas the variant used by the NASB and the Majority text is saying that Jesus was referring to the Name that was given to Him. But, whether it is the one or the other, both variants clearly reference the Name of the Father, as the Name by which His disciples are to be kept, so that they will be one or unified.

So if we use the variant in the Majority text reading and the Nestle-Aland text reading, as reflected in the NASB version, it would be referring to a name that was given by God the Father to the Son, “to give out to the world,” so that people might know who God really is and what the Name Father really meant as we have previously discussed.

In other words, Jesus is saying that the Name of “Father”⁴⁹ was given to the Son in order that He might make it known to the disciples. This does not mean that He gave a Name to the Son, so as to now become His own Name, but, rather, He gave the Name to the Son, so that the Son could then make that Name known to others.

(The Name “Father” is not a name given to the Son. Even when Isaiah calls Him “Everlasting Father,” it does not mean He became a Father, but that He was “called” Everlasting Father, the emphasis being on “called.” Isaiah does not say he “is” the Everlasting Father, but that he is “called” Everlasting Father. Why?—for the very same reason Jesus said to Philip the following, when Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”—John 14:8-10.)

This reading found in Majority text and Nestle-Aland text may be the correct reading for various reasons, but also, perhaps, because in some ways it is similar to what happened to Moses, when he was sent to the children of Israel, as recorded in Exodus 13:13-14.

Exodus 3:13-14 And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them? ¹⁴ And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. KJV

As Moses was given a Name to make known to the children of Israel, so too, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is likened to Moses in Heb. 3:1-6, was given a Name to make known to the children of Israel. Moses as **a prophet** spoke in the Name of the great I AM, and the Lord Jesus as **the Prophet** spoke in the Name of the Father (cf. Acts 3:22). As Moses manifested a name of God to the children of Israel, the Lord Jesus manifested a name of God to the children of Israel, just as our Lord says in verse 6 of this prayer.

John 17:6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. KJV

⁴⁹ The Greek word πατήρ (Father) is repeatedly referred to as a name of God (cf. Matt. 6:9; Jn. 5:43; 10:25; 12:28; 17:5-6). Indeed, it is also a part of the name of the Blessed Trinity (see Matt. 28:19).

Moreover, I should also mention something I mentioned in the first volume of this work. When we examine the Name which Jesus manifested to the children of Israel, i.e. the Name “Father,” it becomes even more significant when we remember that the Name of Father for God was not often used in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament (utilizing the New American Standard Version) the word “father” appears 1060 times regardless of whether it was capitalized or not. However, when it was used of God, it seems it was only used 5 times. It was used twice in Isaiah (Isa. 63:16; 64:8); it was used once in Psalms (Ps. 89:26); and it was used twice in Jeremiah (Jer. 3:4, 16). Only 5 times was God referred to by the name of “Father” in the entire Old Testament!

But, in the New Testament, the word “Father” was used for God approximately 232 times. So in the Old Testament it was used only 5 times to refer to God; in the New Testament, it was used 232 times! This was the Name of God that was given by God to His Son, in order for Him to “manifest” that Name to His disciples. And so, we see that our Lord is referring to the Name, “Father,” when He prays to God His Father to keep His disciples in the Name.

In that light, we should also mention that the word Greek word translated “keep” in this context carries the meaning of guarding, protecting, or preserving. And, since in verse 15 our Lord repeats this aspect of His prayer, we know that such guarding includes protecting His disciples from evil.

John 17:15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that **thou shouldest keep them from the evil.** KJV

However, this phrase translated as “from the evil” in the KJV, is the Greek phrase, ἐκ (from) τοῦ (the) πονηροῦ (evil), which one will notice includes the definite article before the word evil, which tells us that Jesus is referring to a specific type of evil, and not to evil in general.

This articular phrase is only used one other time by John in his writings and that is in his epistle. In I John 3:12 he writes: “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one (ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ) ...” In that verse the KJV translators chose to translate it as referring to the Devil. A similar

articular phrase, using a different preposition ἀπό, which means “from,” is used by Paul in II Thess. 3:3.

II Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you **from the evil one** ((ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ). NKJV

All this goes to show that our Lord was being very specific in His request of the Father.

If Jesus was referring to evil in general, He could have used an anarthrous noun in the prepositional phrase. As such, it is unfortunate that some translations do not translate the definite article that John includes, which makes it seem that Jesus is asking the Father to keep them from evil in general. Now, of course, the Lord desires that we all should abstain from all forms of evil, general or specific (I Thess. 5:22), but in His prayer our Lord is asking the Father to keep His disciples from a very specific evil, which is none other than the evil one, i.e. Satan, the enemy of our souls.

Therefore, returning to John 17:15, I believe the better rendering for the phrase is found in the NKJV, which renders the phrase as “from the evil one,” as also does the NASB.

John 17:15 “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them **from the evil one**. NKJV

John 17:15 “I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them **from the evil one**. NASB

And so, since His request is that the Father would keep them in His Name so that the disciples may be one, it bespeaks the Father guarding them from the enemy of our souls, the evil one who wishes to keep such a oneness from ever happening.

Now, some may wonder as to how we know it has to do with Satan trying to hinder their oneness? We know this because at the end of verse 11 the Lord Jesus reveals that the purpose of His request unto the Father. This is shown by the Holy Spirit having John use, what is called a “purpose clause,” which begins with the conjunction ἵνα, which conveys the meaning in English of “that,” or “so that,” or “in order that.” Thus the Greek phrase, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἓν, καθὼς ἡμεῖς, could just as well be translated as follows: “in order that they may be one, as we are one.”

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, **in order that they may be one, as we are.**⁵⁰

So now we see that our Lord is concerned about the future oneness of His disciples in John 17:11. And we see in John 17:15 that it is Satan who desires to keep that oneness from ever occurring. Next we see that the reason Satan wishes to stop this oneness from occurring is because such a oneness is the result of one's salvation. We know this because in verse 12 Jesus says He kept His disciples in the Father's Name so that none was lost but the son of perdition, which we know was Judas Iscariot. And the word used by John that is translated "lost," is the Greek word John routinely uses in his Gospel to refer to those who die in their sins, i.e. the unsaved. It is the same Greek verb translated "perish" in John 3:16, so that John 17:12 could just as well be translated as follows.

John 17:12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is **perished**, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

⁵⁰ Some believe that the present tense verb in the subjective mood, translated "may be one," indicates a continuing sense so that He is praying that they might continue in an oneness already existing. Perhaps, that is true, but if one were to render it as "that they may continue on being one," it might create a dissonance with the futuristic present used in the beginning of the verse, by implying that the disciples already possessed the oneness, for which our Lord was praying. We know, of course, that our oneness in Christ as His Church did not begin until after our Lord's death, burial and resurrection, after His blood was shed, and the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:5, I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:13-18). Consequently, if our Lord was referring to a continuing oneness, one must understand it as a continuing oneness from a future perspective, i.e. after our Lord's death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the baptism of the Spirit into the body of Christ. Now, we have already shown in the beginning of this chapter that our Lord was using futuristic present verbs and futuristic perfect verbs in His prayer, so if one wishes to render the verb as "may continue on being one," one must realize it is referring a continuous action from after a future event. In other words, our Lord is asking the Father to keep them in the Name in order that they may continue on being one, but He is asking the Father to preserve that oneness unto eternity, but that was only after it was formed in the future. But as it is difficult sometimes to think this way in English, I think it is best to keep the phrase "that they may be one," which is also an accurate and possible translation. Thus, for all these reasons, I think the KJV rendering (as well as that of the NASB), "that they may be one," is the best translation, when considering the overall context of the passage.

So we see the purpose of our Lord's request for oneness is because that oneness is the result of salvation, and, as we will next see, is the guarantee that our salvation is secure and eternal. This contextual understanding of salvation being that wish Satan is opposing and is the reason why Satan hates the unity and oneness that our Lord prays for is further confirmed in Scripture by our Lord's prayer for one of His other disciples He prayed for. Our Lord said that kept all His disciples, save Judas, but in Luke 22:31-32 we see that Satan wished to also destroy another disciple of our Lord—Peter.

Luke 22:31-32 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have you*, that he may sift *you* as wheat: ³² But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. KJV

But, we also see that our Lord protected him and kept him by praying for him.

With all this in mind we can now proceed to the final phrase in verse 11 and see why and how the oneness that our Lord prays for is a oneness which is the result of salvation, and is a oneness that guarantees our eternal salvation. This also shows why those who wish to believe our Lord was referring to an existing oneness (shown by the use of the present subjective verb ὄσιν), which some characterize as a oneness of purpose or will are wrong in their assessment, for the simple reason our Lord likens the oneness He prays for as being like the oneness of the Blessed Trinity, which is deeper and based upon a different foundation than simply purpose. This is shown to us by final phrase our Lord uses in verse 11 to describe and define the oneness that He prays for is the phrase in the NASB—"even as *We are*."

Jesus asks the Father to keep His disciples in His Name, from the evil one, so that His disciples may be one, even as He and the Father (and the Holy Spirit) are one. This bespeaks of a oneness between the Father and the Son (and, of course, the Holy Spirit) within the Godhead. This also shows us why it is the name of the Father which keeps us. It is because the name, Father, bespeaks relationships and it is the eternal relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that will help us understand our oneness and unity. And this also shows why Satan is so intent on trying to hinder this oneness from occurring, for without this oneness, likened to the oneness of the Father and the Son we could never be saved!

So, since Jesus asks that the Father to keep His disciples in His Name so

that they may be one, just as He and the Father are one, the question naturally arises, if we are to be one, just as the Father and Son are one, “How are the Father and the Son one?” We have already briefly discussed the answer to that question, but let’s now look at it in greater detail, and, perhaps, from another angle.

Some will answer this question with the answer that the Father and the Son are one in purpose. That statement, of course, is true, but that is not what our Lord is saying, nor is it the basis of their oneness. Others may say they are one in love, both being filled with an eternal love. That, too, is true, but that is not what our Lord is saying either. So the question remains, “If believers are to be one, as they are one, *how* are they one?” The answer, of course, is found in Scripture, which we briefly mentioned before, and which we will now once again touch upon. The Holy Spirit tells us how the Son and the Father are one in John 10:30, where the Lord Jesus succinctly declares—

John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.” NASB

Here we see an interesting declaration. The verb, translated “are,” (ἐσμεν) is in the plural form and is used with the masculine gender (i.e. the words *I* and *Father*), and it is construed with a neuter gender word (i.e. the word “one” ἓν). We do not see this in English, but what John is saying is that Jesus was declaring, “I and the Father (masculine genders), *we* are (plural form) one (neuter gender). In other words, the Son and the Father are not simply one in their purpose, or in love, but are one in a “substantial thing,” that being their same substance or essence (thus, the neuter gender). In other words, Jesus is declaring that He is consubstantial with the Father. All that the Father is, the Son is, save His paternity. They are “one” as to substance (neuter gender). He is affirming His consubstantiality when He says, “I and the Father, *we* are one.” (And, of course, this also includes the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit; all Three are One.)

Jesus refers to this same eternal truth in His prayer in John 17:10 when He says to the Father that “all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine.” The New American Standard Bible brings out into English the full weight of this underlying Greek sentence. The possessive pronouns or adjectives are articular in the neuter gender and not the masculine gender. Consequently, it should not be construed with the last phrase, “and I am glorified in them,” which is masculine and refers to those disciples the Father gave to the Son in verse 9. In other words, the

“them” in the last phrase does not refer to the “all things” that are the Son’s and the Father’s. One must leap over this declaration back to the last phrase in verse 9.

Because of this, I believe the phrase, “all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine,” is a parenthetical statement of our Saviour. One could thus translate it as follows (adopting the NASB version) to help with this distinction:

“I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine (**and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine**) and I have been glorified in them.”

And so, since this is the contextual introduction to the oneness of the Father and Son that our Lord mentions in the end of verse 11, I believe that passage should be understood this way (using NASB).

“Now they have come to know that **everything** Thou hast given Me is from Thee; ⁸ for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received *them*, and **truly understood that I came forth from Thee**, and they believed that Thou didst send Me. ⁹ “I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; ¹⁰ (**and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine**); and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ “And I am no more in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, *the name* which Thou hast given Me, that they **may be one, even as We are.** (John 17:7-11)

As one can see, Jesus begins in verse 7 with the fact that the disciples had begun to understand the Son’s relationship to the Father. They now know that that all things that the Son has, have come directly from the Father, as a result of His procession from the Father in verse 8 (see footnote below as to how this relates to His eternal generation from the Father). ⁵¹ Then our Lord reveals in verse 9 the parameters of His prayer—that He is referring to those who are saved, and not to the unsaved of the world. Then, comes the parenthetical statement in the first part of verse 10 referring to His oneness with the Father by declaring their common possession of all “things,” which are those things mutually

⁵¹ For a fuller study on this issue, please see the chapter entitled, “Processional Verses of the Gospel of John,” in the book *Understanding the Trinity*, available at www.silicabiblechapel.com.

possessed by the Father and Himself, which we have mentioned before refers to the basis of the Father and Son's oneness, and of which, we will discuss in greater detail shortly. Then He next reveals the purpose of His prayer for His disciples (which I also believe explains the inclusion of the parenthetical statement regarding the mutual possession of all things between the Father and the Son). That purpose as we already mentioned was that they may be one, even as He and the Father were one, which, of course, also would include the Holy Spirit.

Finally, perhaps, it might help if we take out the parenthetical statement, so one can see how the second part of verse 10, which is, "and I have been glorified in them," construes with the end of verse 9. If we take out the parenthesis it would read as follows:

"I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; and I have been glorified in them."

But the fact is, our Saviour does include the parenthesis, and so it is important for us to understand the reason for its inclusion.

The primary reason it seems the Saviour includes this parenthetical statement is because it lays the basis for understanding, not only how our oneness secures our eternal salvation, but also because it lays the basis for understanding the principle of our unity. It does this because in the following verse our Lord reveals our oneness will be likened unto, and so understood by, their oneness. So with this in mind, let us continue and look at this parenthetical statement in greater detail.

The first thing we notice is that John uses the neuter gender in the phrase—"And all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine." This reveals that He is not referring to the disciples that were given to Him, but, rather (as with John 10:30) the mutual possession of one and the same Divine Substance between the Father and the Son, and so, by all Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, which theologically has been defined as *consubstantiality*, and which historically has been defined by the Greek word, ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*) *the same substance*.

This reveals, dear brethren, how the Son and the Father are one! May God be praised. What makes the Father and Son one is not a separation from evil, as suggested by our brother Darby, but it is because of their eternal possession of the **one and same Divine substance! That is the eternal basis of their eternal unity and perfect communion!** This

again, was shown in a chart in the previous chapter, but we will now provide the chart again, this time as Fig. 2.

Fig. 2—The Unity of the Godhead

	PERSON	ACTIVITY	UNITY
ESSENCE	Substantial	Communicating	Consubstantial
NATURE	Subsistential	Giving	Coinherent
BEING	Attributal	Imparting	Communional

We can see above that the Essence of God is defined by three qualities (proceeding horizontally across). Those three qualities are defined first, by that which is Substantial, i.e. the Divine Substance of God the Father, which, secondly is Communicated without division or diminution (in eternal generation and spiration—i.e. the Activity of the Father) to both the Son and Holy Spirit respectively, which results in their Consubstantiality with the Father, which, in turn, as one can see in the chart above, now becomes the first quality of their Unity.

Thus their Unity is defined by three qualities also, proceeding downward in the chart. The first again is their Consubstantiality, which is the foundational quality of their Unity. Next, because the Son and Holy Spirit are consubstantial with the Father, they are all Coinherent, which in turn results in a perfect Communion, for they are all within each other and so know each other fully.

(Of course all this occurs in eternity and so is timeless. In eternity there is not one moment after another. Time was created and so did not always exist, but had a beginning, as Titus 1:2 NKJV declares. So all that the Father does is eternal, which means there never was a time when the Son was not, therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal.).

And so, back in John 10:30, when Jesus declared that He and the Father are one, He was declaring they are one in essence, i.e. in Substance—the Greek word *ἐν* (one) also being in neuter gender, like the neuter gender “all things” in John 17:10, which says they mutually possess all the same things, meaning the Father and Son are one. This, of course, is because things must characterize something, and the Father and Son’s things, which they mutually possess, must be none other than those things (in

other words, attributes) which characterize the one Divine Substance. This, of course, means Jesus was declaring Himself to be more than simply a man; He is saying He is Divine, one with the God the Father, very God of very God!

You see, if Jesus was simply saying He and the Father were one in purpose in John 10:30, the Jewish leaders would not have wished to stone Him. *They believed all Jews should be one in purpose with God.* To them that is what it meant to keep the Torah, to obey the Law of God. No, they wished to stone Him, because they understood Jesus was declaring His consubstantiality with the Father, which would make Him one with Him and so Divine.

What we do not see in English is that John leaves off the article with the word “man” and with the word “God” in John 10:33. In other words, as in John 1:1, John is using the anarthrous construction for the word “God.” He is showing the reader that he is talking about the essence or substance of God, and not just the mere identity of God, which shows that John is declaring that the Son was God, according to His Divine Nature.

Also, by using the same anarthrous construction for the word “Man,” he is telling us that the Jews understood Him to be a human no different than they were (which, indeed, according to His Human Nature, He was, that is minus their sin, and their sin nature, since He was sinless and never had a sin nature), and so was none other than the promised seed of the Woman.

So by the underling Greek text, John is telling us that the reason the Jewish leaders wanted to stone Jesus is that (in their estimation) Jesus was essentially “Man,” no different than they were, yet He was making Himself out to be essentially “God,” being one with Him, by having the same substance as God. John makes it plain for the reader that this was their understanding by his anarthrous use of “Man” and “God.”

Therefore, returning to our verse in John chapter seventeen, when Jesus prays that believers may be one as He and the Father are one, and when He prays that we may be kept in oneness by that Name, what He is saying is that our oneness, like His oneness with God the Father, is the result of being begotten by God (and born of the Spirit), in which a communication of life occurs (our eternal life), which, in turn, results in a consubstantiality of all those who have been born again and received a

communication of life. (But, of course, ours is a different begetting than His, since He is Only-Begotten, and so is a different communication of life, which means a different consubstantiality, as we will now see.)

Thus, what Jesus is saying, is that we are one because we are “related” to the same Father, begin begotten of Him (Jn. 1:13). We all have a common source—we are all sons and daughters of God the Father by being born again of the Spirit. And in our own temporal begetting from God the Father by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, we also possess a common substance, which brings about our oneness or unity. But it is very important to note, again, that this is a limited analogy! **Our common substance is not the same as the one substance of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit!** Our common substance is none other than the Son of God, Himself, who dwells within our hearts! Our common substance is the life of Christ within us. The apostle John declares to us in I John 5:12, “He that has the Son has life!” We all receive that common life which unifies us by our being temporally begotten of God our Father (John 1:13), through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5), whereby we receive the Son, in whom is Life (Jn. 1:4; Col. 3:4; I Jn. 5:11)! Oh, how wonderful is the gift of God our Father! Our communication of life is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts!

Therefore, we can now see why Jesus prays that we may be kept in oneness by that Name of God—the Father—because that Name bespeaks our common life received from God the Father, in the Person of the Son, by our being born again of the Holy Spirit. How great is our salvation!

Beloved, how could we ever be divided from another Christian, when that Christian has the same life of God within them? He or she is our brother or our sister in the Lord. We are to be one, because we are all related, because we all possess, in our hearts, by His grace, the same life of Christ, and we all have the same Father who begot us by the Holy Spirit’s new birth.

As Christians, we must remember, we have something that no other world religion has—the very life from God our Father in the Person of His Son by the sanctifying indwelling work of the Holy Spirit of God. The very Creator of the Universe indwells the heart of every believer. Of all the religions of the world, Christianity should be able to show forth the beauties of that Life. God is One. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have dwelt in perfect oneness and unity from all of eternity, having the

same and undivided substance of the Godhead. That is their eternal principle of unity, not separation from evil.

And, we have the glory of His life within us in the Person of the Son. That is our principle of unity, not separation from evil. And His life is not selfish. His life is not divisive. His life is not filled with pride, or condescension, or with self-righteousness. So if we find ourselves selfish, divided from our brethren, or proud, it cannot be from His Life! But man, in his carnal nature, is, indeed divisive and selfish and proud. James identifies this weakness within Christians with a question—

Jam. 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? NASB

Quarrels and divisions do not come from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Blessed Trinity has never been divided and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have never quarreled. Man's flesh is what drives such divisions between believers, and when those divisions result in a separation, or result in a claim of spiritual pride that they are the only one true Assembly on earth in a particular location, such a division and claim does not reflect the life of God, but rather the carnal and soulical life of man.

Oneness gives us expression to our common bond, and to our common life – the life that we have from God the Father. It gives expression to His nature.

So, Jesus is saying that we are kept one in the Name of the Father, which shows that we are all begotten of God and have one life. We are called brethren by God. Why?—because we have a common Father. We are called Christians. Why?—because we are anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, and we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the anointed One. We are called saints. Why?—because God has separated us from the world, not from each other.

And this is why Jesus asks the Father to keep us from the evil one who will not want this oneness to occur, for Satan knows that true unity or oneness can only come from a communication of life, which in our case, is the result of our being born again and having Christ dwell in our hearts. And Satan knows that such life that we receive in new birth is eternal, which means our salvation is also eternal, which means it is secure as we will further see later in the chapter. This is why Satan hates oneness, for oneness comes is part of our eternal salvation.

What a wonderful principle of unity God has given us. God's principle of unity is not "separation from evil," but first and foremost God's principle of unity for His Church is the common life of God, which is our in Christ Jesus our Lord. He that hath the Son hath Life!

The Sanctification of the Son—vs. 17-21

This now brings us to the next portion in our Lord's High Priestly prayer where he prays that we may be one from another perspective, the sanctification of the Son—John 17:17-21.

Verse 17-21—Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. ¹⁸ **As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.** ¹⁹ **And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.** ²⁰ **Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;** ²¹ **That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. KJV**

Our Lord in this portion of the prayer asks that the Father to sanctify His disciples in Truth, and He says the Word is truth. Now, the most common thought on this is that our Lord is referring to the words of the Gospel, or to Scripture, which, indeed, I think He is (that is, in one sense) since the Father did, indeed, give the Lord Jesus "words" to speak to us.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and **my words abide in you**, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. KJV

John 17:8 For I **have given unto them the words which thou gavest me**; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. KJV

Also it seems to be referring to word of Scripture because we see in other places that Scripture does sanctify, as it is sharper than any two-edged sword, and so is able to cut and to separate.

Ephesians 5:26 That he might **sanctify** and cleanse it with the washing of water **by the word**. KJV

I Timothy 4:5 For it is **sanctified by the word of God** and prayer. KJV

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
KJV

But we equally know the Word is also used of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its most significant use, of course, is found in the first chapter of this Gospel where the λόγος refers to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14)

John 1:1 In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. KJV

John 1:14 And the **Word** was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
KJV

Consequently, returning to our verse on sanctification and oneness, when Jesus asks the Father to sanctify them in truth because He says, Thy **Word** is truth, Jesus might be indicating more than just the Father sanctifying them by the Sacred Word; He might also be asking the Father to sanctify them in **Himself**, the “Logos,” the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and the Word who was God. In other words, Jesus might be praying thus—Sanctify them in the Truth, thy Word is Truth (with Truth and Word being capitalized because it refers to the Person of the Son).

This fact seems to be confirmed, when in verse 19, Jesus says that for their sakes He sanctifies **Himself**, so that they could be sanctified—”And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”

In other words, it seems Jesus is saying the only way the Father can sanctify them in Truth, is for Jesus to sanctify Himself (who is the Truth). Therefore, Jesus is indicating that not only is He the Word (λόγος), He also is the Truth in which they are all sanctified by the Father, not only His immediate disciples, of course, but also all those who will believe thereafter (vs. 20). After all, just moments before, around the Passover Table, Jesus had already declared to them the following: “I am the Way, **the Truth**, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. (John 14:6 -capitalization mine- KJV).

In regard to this understanding, Athanasius once said—

“And therefore also He is the Truth, saying, ‘I am the Truth,’ and in His address to His Father, He said, ‘Sanctify them through Thy Truth, Thy Word is Truth.’”⁵²

Now, granted, this is nothing in the Greek language itself that would absolutely indicate that Jesus was referring to Himself as the “Word” and the “Truth,” as we are wont to do in English by using upper case letters. The Greek language does not make such distinctions of upper and lower case letters in order to distinguish a *common noun* from a *proper noun*. But on the other hand there is nothing in the Greek language, per se, that would demand it to be simply a common noun. In the Greek language, such things are usually indicated to the reader by context (and sometimes by the anarthrous or articular use of the article).

However, in this case, context does not help us conclusively. John uses our word λόγος both for the words that Jesus spoke (e.g. John 15:3; 17:6, 14), and for Jesus as the Word of God, the Word which was with God, and the Word which was God (John 1:1). And, so we see that John uses it both ways. But that might be by design, meaning both should be understood as a means for our sanctification and oneness.

As such, since the Holy Spirit’s uses λόγος in the Gospel for both the spoken word, and the Person of the Son, let’s look a little closer to the actual words used in verse 17, and see if there are other reasons why the Holy Spirit may also be referring to Jesus as the Word and Truth, meaning Jesus as the Word of God, and not just the word of Scripture.

In John 17:17, both in the Majority Text and the Stephanus Text used by the King James Translators, the Holy Spirit uses two different pronouns in the verse as shown below. This shows us an additional emphasis is being made, thereby showing that Jesus is more than likely also referring to Himself in John 17:17 as both the Word and the Truth.

These two different pronouns are seen (in the Majority Text) when John switches from a personal pronoun to a possessive pronoun as can be seen below by the use of a very literal and wooden translation, yet also a somewhat expanded translation.

⁵² Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, ed., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: St. Athanasius: Select works and letters, Vol. IV* (The Christian Literature Company, New York, 1892) pg. 404

John 17:17 Ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ σου· ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστιν.

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the Truth of **You (σου)**: the Word *that is* **Thine (σὸς)** is Truth.

The pronoun **σου** is known as a personal pronoun and the pronoun **σὸς** is known as a possessive pronoun (which some prefer to view as an adjective). They are two different Greek words, which we might not notice in English, but is readily seen in Greek. Now the question must be asked, “Why did the Holy Spirit inspire John to switch to a possessive pronoun, especially since the personal pronoun sufficiently carries a possessive sense? Moreover, in John 17:1, John uses the same personal pronoun twice in the same verse. He writes: δόξασόν σου τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα καὶ ὁ υἱός σου δοξάσῃ σε· (glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee). The same personal pronoun is used in both places. So it would be very natural for John to repeat the process in verse 17 and write: Ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ σου· ὁ λόγος σου ἀλήθειά ἐστιν (sanctify them in thy truth, thy word is truth), in which case, one might very well conclude that John was referring to the Sacred Word of Scripture.

Consider these very similar constructions in the LXX where that same personal pronoun was used and was closely associated with the Word of God, meaning Scripture.

Psalms 119 (118):86 All **thy commandments are truth** (αἱ ἐντολαί σου ἀλήθεια); they persecuted me unjustly; help thou me. (Brenton’s Version)

Psalms 119 (118):142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and **thy law is truth** (ὁ νόμος σου ἀλήθεια). (Brenton’s Version)

Psalms 119 (118):160 The **beginning of thy words is truth** (ἀρχὴ τῶν λόγων σου ἀλήθεια); and all the judgments of thy righteousness *endure* for ever. (Brenton’s Version)

And so, we see it would have been very natural to one familiar to the Greek Septuagint (as the early apostles were) to simply write— Ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ σου ὁ λόγος σου ἀλήθειά ἐστιν, using two personal pronouns. This would have been similar to the Greek usage in the LXX. But John did not! And so, again the question must be asked why switch to a possessive pronoun? I think the answer can be found from a closer examination of John’s use of these pronouns in his Gospel.

It is important to note that the personal pronoun **σοῦ** can be used possessively, but sometimes it can also carry the additional nuance of source at the same time. However, in many cases it only carries the idea of possession. For example, in these verses we can see that the pronoun **σοῦ** only carries the sense of possession, having no connotation of source.

John 4:16 Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy (**σοῦ**) husband, and come hither. KJV

John 11:23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy (**σοῦ**) brother shall rise again. KJV

However, consider the following verses in the Gospel of John. The same pronoun **σοῦ** not only conveys the idea of possession, but it also conveys the idea of source.

John 4:50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy (**σοῦ**) son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. KJV

John 8:13 The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy (**σοῦ**) record is not true. KJV

The first phrase, “thy son liveth,” could just as well be understood in English to mean that “the son of thee liveth.” And in the second example, the phrase, “thy record is not true,” could just as well be understood in English to also mean that “the record from thee is not true.” Obviously, the son proceeded from his father and so was his son and our Lord’s testimony proceeded from His lips, and so was His testimony or record. Thus the pronoun carried a dual nuance.

And so when we return to context of John chapter 17, we can see that every instance of this personal pronoun in the genitive case allows this dual nuance; it carries not only the nuance of possession, but also the nuance of source. Let’s look at each instance. I will put in bold brackets the additional nuance of source, which will still be self-evident in those verses where the idea is obscured in English.

John 17:1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify **thy** (**σοῦ**) Son [**the Son of Thee**], that thy Son also may glorify thee: KJV

John 17:6 I have manifested **thy (σου)** name [**the name of thee**] unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. KJV

John 17:7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are **of thee (σου)**. KJV

John 17:8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out **from thee (σου)**, and they have believed that thou didst send me. KJV

John 17:11 And I am no more in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in **Thy(σου)** name [**in the name of thee**],⁵³ *the name* which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We *are*. NASB

John 17:12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in **thy (σου)** name [**in the name of thee**]: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. KJV

John 17:14 I have given them **thy (σου)** word [**the word of thee**]; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. KJV

John 17:26 And I have declared unto them **thy (σου)** name [**the name of thee**], and will declare *it*: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. KJV

Thus, in verse 17, especially, in light of this dual usage of the personal pronoun as a genitive of possession and a genitive of source, the phrase “Sanctify them in Thy truth,” could also be understood as, “Sanctify them in the Truth of Thee,” indicating both source and possession. Now, granted to translate the phrase this way in English is forced and unnatural, and so I think it should be kept as, “Sanctify them in Thy Truth,” or, “Sanctify them in Your Truth,” for English readers. But it would be perfectly appropriate to convey this understanding of “in the

⁵³ Some may think that the pronoun in these verses, bespeaking the Name of the Father, should only be seen as a possessive pronoun with no nuance of source. However, when one thinks about it, one realizes it also carries the nuance of source, for where did the Name of Father come from, if not from Himself? He has no beginning! There is no one before Him in order. He is unbegotten! The Name came from Himself as revelation that He is unbegotten, and so it also is used by John with the nuance of source.

Truth of Thee,” let’s say, in a margin, since to a Greek reader that would be a very natural understanding of the phrase.

With this dual understanding, the Gospel reader would then wonder if Jesus referring to Himself as the Truth, or is He referring to the Scripture, or, perhaps, to both?

In other words, exactly what does Jesus mean by, “Sanctify them in the Truth of Thee? The answer comes in the next sentence. Jesus says, “Thy Word is Truth.” It is important to note that an article is present both before the noun and the possessive pronoun (adjective), which we do not see in our English Versions, but both are articular in the Greek.

This, I believe, answers the question we posed. The article identifies which truth Jesus is talking about. He is identifying which truth He is referencing. Literally our Lord’s request could read—”**The Word, that is Thine, is Truth**”—in which case He means Himself as the Word of God. It seems by this emphasis of possession that John is continuing with the theme he began with in his Gospel. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

And that Word, John declares in John 1:14, 18 was none other than the Only-Begotten Son of God the Father. As such, consider these verses that bespeak possession by the Father and refer to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee. KJV

Proverbs 8:22 The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. KJV

Matthew 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. KJV

Moreover, the apostle Paul in Scripture also uses an adjective possessively to refer to the Son.

Romans 8:32 He that spared not **his own (ἰδίου) Son**, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? KJV

This possessive adjective is defined by Edward Robinson in his Greek Lexicon and English Lexicon of the New Testament as follows:

“ **ἰδιος**...as belonging to one's self and not to another, own, proper, peculiar, viz. (a) denoting ownership, that of which one is himself the owner, possessor, producer, my own, thy own, his own, etc.” ⁵⁴

Thus, we see that Paul is emphasizing the peculiar and proper relationship of God's Son in contrast to God's other sons, i.e. the sons of God, which Paul mentions just a few verses earlier in Rom. 8:19.

In the same way, it seems that John, by the Holy Spirit, is emphasizing the peculiar and proper relationship of Christ as the Word of God, by using the possessive pronoun/adjective **σὸς**, in contrast to His words spoken through His Son, referenced a few verses earlier in John 17:6 and 14, which is construed with the personal pronoun **σὺ**, and not the possessive pronoun **σὸς**.

And so this fact may explain why the Holy Spirit has John switch from a personal pronoun of possession and source to a purely possessive pronoun of possession. Jesus is not simply referring to “truth,” in general. It is not just truth in general by which we are sanctified. Rather, Jesus is declaring that the Truth in which He is asking the Father to sanctify His disciples, is none other than Himself, the Λόγος, the Eternal Word of God, which was in the beginning with God, and which was God, which was made flesh, and which is none other than **His** Only-Begotten Son (John 1:1, 14,18 KJV)!

As such, the switch to the possessive pronoun, unlike his pattern in previous verses, emphasizes this fact. And, it also explains why as the Word, and why as Truth, in verse 19, Jesus next declares: “And for their sakes I sanctify **Myself**, that they themselves also may be sanctified in **Truth**.” This is a wonderful statement! Without, necessarily discounting the fact that we are sanctified by Scripture, which is also the Word of God, John is showing (at least initially) we are sanctified in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Word of God!

Athanasius also understood this wonderful truth as we shared before, saying, “...therefore also **He is the Truth**, saying, ‘I am the Truth,’ and

⁵⁴ Edward Robinson, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Thomas Clark, Edinburgh, 1838) pg. 367-368

in His address to His Father, He said, ‘Sanctify them through Thy Truth, **Thy Word is Truth.**’⁵⁵

Moreover, this is also shown because John uses the preposition ἐν in the first clause of the verse. He writes: Ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ σου, which, according to the context, I believe should be translated as “sanctify them in thy truth,” with the preposition being translated by its most common understanding, that being “in,” as opposed to its additional understandings of “cause” or “means.”

By way of illustration, according to the Online Bible, the preposition ἐν in the KJV of Scripture is translated 1902 times by the English preposition “in,” 163 times by the preposition “by,” 140 times by the preposition “with,” 117 times by the preposition “among,” 113 times by the preposition “at,” 62 times by the preposition “on,” and only 39 times by the preposition “through.”⁵⁶ Of course, usage should never determine translation; context must determine translation. But when context allows various understanding, usage sometimes will be of an aid as long as one does not assume the majority usage must always prevail. But, in the verse before us, indications are that the Greek preposition ἐν should be understood by its most common usage, that being “in.” Such versions as the NASB, the ERV, the ASV, as well as Young’s Literal Translation all see it as indicating location, i.e. “in,” or “within.”

Consequently, all these facts lead us to believe that Jesus is asking the Father to sanctify all believers in “Himself,” the One who is, and is embodying “Truth” upon earth, just like He said in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man cometh to the Father but by Me.” And He is asking the Father to sanctify them in Himself, the One who is the Word, in whom is Life, just as John declares in John 1:4, “In him was Life; and the Life was the light of men.”

This truth of our sanctification in Christ Jesus is also affirmed in other places in Scripture.

⁵⁵ Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, ed., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: St. Athanasius: Select works and letters, Vol. IV* (The Christian Literature Company, New York, 1892) pg. 404

⁵⁶ Sourced from: Online Bible Edition, Version 2.00.04 June 21, 2006 Copyright © 1992-2006 Importancia!

I Corinthians 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, **to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus**, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: KJV

I Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, **but you were sanctified**, but you were justified **in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ**, and in the Spirit of our God. NASB

I Corinthians But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us** wisdom from God, and righteousness and **sanctification**, and redemption. NASB

So with this truth before us, let us now continue and read these verses in John 17 again with this truth in mind, which I will include below with certain changes in translation to show this understanding; I will adapt the KJV.

“Sanctify them in Thy **Truth**. The **Word** *that is* Thine is truth. As thou hast sent **Me** into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.¹⁹ And for their sakes **I sanctify Myself**, that also they might be **sanctified in Truth**.²⁰ (And I do not ask for these alone, but also for them which shall believe on Me through their word;)²¹ in order that they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in Me, and I in Thee, that also they may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me.” (John 17:17-21—Parentheses and capitalization are mine.)

What we see in this portion that I have adapted by emphasizing the underlying Greek text in certain portions is that our Lord sanctifies Himself so the Father can sanctify the disciples. This is another confirmation that John 17:17 speaks of our Lord as the one in whom we are sanctified, and it shows that one cannot discount the fact that He is the Word and the Truth in which the saints are sanctified. If Jesus did not sanctify Himself, we could never be sanctified in Him. We could never be separated from the world and be “set apart” in Him. The death of Christ was a necessary thing for our sanctification to occur as the writer of Hebrews plainly declares.

Hebrews 10: 10, 14 By the which will we are **sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ** once *for all*.¹⁴ For by one offering he hath **perfected** for ever them that are sanctified. KJV

Obviously, in this portion of Hebrews, this sanctification cannot refer to the Word of God or Sacred Scripture, but refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, as it plainly declares. So by comparing this portion in Hebrews with our

verses in the Gospel of John we can see that Jesus revealed that it was a necessity that He sanctify Himself, offering up His body as a sacrifice for sin, so that we might be sanctified in Truth, meaning in Him who is the Truth—the Lord Jesus Christ. By His sacrifice, His offering, His sanctification of Himself, He perfected forever the ones being sanctified in Truth as we can see above in Heb. 10: 14. In fact, in Heb. 10:14, the word “perfected” is the same word used by John in Jn. 17:23 where it is found in its participial form.

John 17:23 I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be **perfected** in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. NASB

If not for the offering of Christ, His willingness to sanctify Himself for us, we never would have been **perfected in unity**. Once this was done, once the Son sanctified Himself, offering up His body, the Father could then sanctify us in Him. How? By begetting us to a living hope through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, in which act we were baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. Our sanctification is being placed into the Body of Christ by God the Father through the baptizing of the Holy Spirit of God (I Cor. 12:13). In this act we are sanctified, “set apart” from the world, from those who do not believe; we are sanctified by being baptized into His body (i.e. the Human Nature of the Son, which is forever unionized with His Divine Nature, without confusion, change, division or separation), and so made members of His body, of flesh and of His bones as the apostle Paul declares.

Ephesians 5:30 For we are members of **his body, of his flesh, and of his bones**. KJV

This results, as we shall presently see, in our being one with each other, by our being within Him (vs. 21).

Moreover, with this understanding of His sanctification of Himself, we can now also understand how the blood of Christ that was shed for us on the cross is the principle by which we are made one, by it being our bond of peace, as we saw earlier. His blood is that which cleanses us, whereby the Father can forgive us, so that the Holy Spirit can unify us.

Hebrews 13:12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might **sanctify the people with his own blood**, suffered without the gate. KJV

This sanctification of us by His blood could only have occurred by His sanctification of Himself, which bespeaks His setting Himself aside as a sacrifice for our sin.

Paul says it this way—

II Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. KJV

And, of course, this explains why Paul also said in Eph. 2:13-15 the following—

Ephesians 2:13-15 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh **by the blood of Christ.** ¹⁴ **For he is our peace,** who hath **made both one,** and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us;*¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; **for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.** KJV

And, this is what leads us back to the verse we began with in the first chapter of the book regarding the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Our oneness or unity is maintained only in this bond that is peace that was won for us by our Lord's sanctification of Himself, by our Lord's setting Himself aside to be sin for us, by our Lord's willingness to shed His precious blood for us upon the cross. This is a precious aspect of God's principle of unity for the Church—our sanctification in Him, whereby He becomes our bond that is peace. As Paul said above, "He is our Peace!" We are one in Him. He holds us together!

Finally, in my adaption I made of the KJV two pages earlier, one can infer from my use of parentheses, that I take verse 20 parenthetically and so see that it refers to the whole prayer of the Lord and not just what He had prayed from verse 17 onward. Let me provide the adaption again.

"Sanctify them in Thy **Truth.** The **Word** *that is* Thine is truth. ¹⁸ As thou hast sent **Me** into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes **I sanctify Myself,** that also they might be **sanctified in Truth.** ²⁰ (And I do not ask for these alone, but also for them which shall believe on Me through their word;) ²¹ in order that they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in Me, and I in Thee, that also they may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me." (John 17:17-21)

As such, one should link verse 21 with verse 19. In other words, the flow of thought, without the parenthesis, would be as follows: “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified in Truth...in order that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me.” This shows us that our oneness is based upon His sanctification of Himself. Our sanctification in truth is the reason we are one.

With that thought in mind, the parenthesis then tells us that the oneness or unity made possible for us by the Name of the Father, which bespeaks our begetting of Him, by being born of the Spirit, extends to “every” believer in this dispensation. And the oneness or unity made possible by the Son sanctifying of Himself, extends to “every” believer in this dispensation. And so we see that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are all involved in making the saints one.

Next, we see that our oneness or unity results in a limited coinherence. Jesus says that as the Father and the Son coinhere in each other, indicating their oneness, so our coinhering in the Son shows forth our oneness. By being born again and so being baptized into His body, we are placed into Christ, and if we are in Christ, obviously we would be in the Father, not because we are directly in the Father, but because Christ is in the Father, and we are in Christ.

The apostle Peter likens Christ to Noah’s Ark in which we pass through the waters of judgment. He states:

I Peter 3:18-21 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. NKJV

Peter is saying that as Noah was saved through water by being in an Ark, so too, we are saved from the judgmental waters of death, by being in Christ, who is our Ark. With Noah Ark, eight souls were saved. With Christ as our Ark everyone who believes is saved. We are safe and secure in Him, but we are also one family within Him! In other words, coinherence shows forth our oneness or unity. (Again, this is an analogy

which must remain a limited. Our coinherence is not the same as the coinherence of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, for the simple fact we are not infinite and consubstantial in the full sense of the word. Analogies are meant to teach certain truths; they are not meant to become the foundational basis of truth in every way. Types, parables, analogies, etc., must never be stretched too far.) We are one because we all have been placed into Christ.

One final aspect should be mentioned before we proceed. We began this section of our Lord's High Priestly prayer by asking how we should understand the word "Word" (λόγος). We showed how it bespoke the eternal word of God. We also showed that many verses that revealed that we are sanctified by that word of God. But we also showed that it referred to the Son as the Word of God. Indeed, we showed that it primarily referred to the Person of the Son, but we did not deny that it also referred to Scripture. With this in mind, I would like to examine the last phrase in verse 19 where Jesus prays that they "may be sanctified in truth."

One might notice that this phrase is translated as sanctified "through the truth" in the King James Version, and as sanctified "in truth" by the New American Standard. The underlying Greek phrase is ἐν ἀληθείᾳ. Now, the KJV translates the Greek preposition as they did in verse 17, as "through," and the NASB translates it as they also did in verse 17, as "in." But that is not what we now would like to discuss. We have already examined that point. What we would now like to discuss is the inclusion or exclusion of the definite article "the" before truth at all.

Unlike the phrase in verse 17, ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, "in the Truth," this phrase in verse 19 is anarthrous (not having the definite article), ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, "in truth." Not every English translation shows this distinction. Both the KJV and the NKJV translate it with a definite article, as do some other modern versions, and some, unfortunately, because of their philosophy of dynamic equivalence, rob the Christian entirely of what our Lord was saying by turning this noun into an adverb translating it as "truly." This is the danger of so many modern translations. So many of them use dynamic equivalence and so change, add and delete words from the Sacred Text, and substitute their own ideas or interpretations into the text. Why?—because they think it is the thought that is inspired and not each and every word. The problem, of course, is so many times their thought of what the text says may be completely "false," and yet they purport to present "truth" in their translation. This verse is a prime

example of this, but ironically, it will allow us to explore more deeply this phrase used by our Lord.

Such modern translations as the New International Version and the English Bible in Basic English change this noun into an adverb and translate it as “truly.” By doing this they delete the preposition that was inspired by the Holy Spirit in the sentence and so changed the phrase to such an extent that it allows the thought that Jesus believes that God will sanctify His disciples, but that Jesus is afraid that God’s sanctification may not really be a true and authentic sanctification, that is unless the Son first sanctifies Himself. Therefore, He sanctifies Himself so the Father will be able to “truly” sanctify the disciples.

Now, of course, this presents a shallow view of the Father, for it implies that God will sanctify the disciples, but if the Son does not sanctify Himself, the sanctification of the Father will be less than complete or perfect, so that it will not truly be a proper sanctification. In other words, it implies the Father’s sanctification would somehow be faulty, less than complete or somehow imperfect. Beloved, this truly shows the danger of versions like the NIV which interpret Scripture *for you*, rather than just try to faithfully translate the words of the text and leave the interpretation *to you*. They do not need to interpret the text for everybody (translate the text, yes; interpret, no) by changing God’s Word to reflect their interpretation of the text. If they desire to provide an interpretation they can create their own commentary, or at the minimum keep such viewpoints in the margin.

The Bible in Basic English’s translation is even worse. Unfortunately, like the translators of the NIV they use their philosophy of dynamic equivalence to supposedly intuit the thought of John and then reword the verse to communicate their interpretation. By doing so, some might say they end up having John writing a heretical statement. They have Jesus praying: “And for them I make myself holy, so that they may be made truly holy” (Jn. 17:19 BBE). Not only do they delete the preposition ἐν (in) just like the NIV, and then also like the NIV change the noun “truth” into an adverb, they also change the verb ἁγιάζω (I sanctify) in the beginning of the verse into an adjective “holy.” Thus, rather than Jesus praying to the Father on behalf of His disciples, “I sanctify Myself,” they have Jesus praying on behalf of His disciples, “I make myself holy.” What? Jesus must make Himself holy! Would that not mean that until He makes Himself holy, He is not holy? Beloved that is heretical. The Son of God does not and did not need to make Himself holy. He always was,

and ever will be holy. He is the Holy One of God, very God of very God, holy with the same holiness of the Father, as He and the Father are one.

Isaiah declares holiness. He records for us the words of the Son (who Isaiah calls the LORD God, the Redeemer, **the Holy One** of Israel in Isaiah 48:17), who reveals that the Father and the Holy Spirit (vs. 16) sent Him. This is one of the wonderful verses in the Old Testament that reveals to us the Blessed Trinity—the Lord God (the Father), His Spirit (the Holy Spirit), and Me (the Son, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel).

Isaiah 48:16-17 “Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I *was* there. And now the **LORD GOD** and **His Spirit** Have sent **Me**.”¹⁷ Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, **The Holy One of Israel**: “I *am* the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go. NKJV

So, in other words, the Son did not need to make Himself holy. He already was holy!

Of course, in the New Testament, Peter, by the Holy Spirit declares the same thing, declaring that He was holy in Acts 2:27.

Acts 2:27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer **thine Holy One** to see corruption. KJV

And even the demons knew He was Holy.

Mark 1:24 Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, **the Holy One of God**. KJV

And yet the translators of the BBE alter God’s Word to have our Lord state that He must make Himself holy. How terrible, for it implies our Lord was not always holy, so that in the end, it does a disservice not only to the Father, who eternally begat Him, but also to the Son, who was eternally begotten by Him. If the Son must make Himself holy, then that means the Father was not always holy for He begat one who was not holy, which, in turn, would mean the Father was less than perfect in His actions, and so was liable to imperfection in those things He does.

Thus we can see how the dynamic equivalence translation of the BBE has Jesus implying that unless the Son makes Himself holy, the Father

may not be able to make His disciples holy in its truest sense, i.e. He may not be able to make them “truly” holy.

Beloved, such thinking is simply not true. God does nothing imperfect or incomplete. Everything He does is perfect and complete. The Father does not need the Son to do something to insure that what He does is done “truly!” The Father does all things truly, for He is perfect in every way!

Deuteronomy 32:4 *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.* KJV

As such, since the Lord Jesus Christ knows that the Father does all things truly and in perfection, He never would imply that the Father could do no less. Thus, the NIV and other versions like it mislead the Christian of what our Lord is saying. Or at the minimum, they do not allow the Christian to consider all possibilities of what our Lord meant, for if they translated it faithfully a Christian could take “in truth,” as either “in the truth,” or as “in the Truth,” and then seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, themselves, as to what Jesus really meant. But with their deleting of the preposition “ἐν” (in) and their change of the noun to an adverb, they force the Christian to accept their interpretation. (Beloved, believe me, many modern versions do this throughout the entire Bible, just like the NIV does here and in so many other places. You think you are reading what Jesus said, or Paul said, or John said, but you are not. In many places you are reading what the translator “thinks” they said, according to their own opinion. Such translators are robbing you of your spiritual heritage that is the Eternal Word of God. And in this case what they are saying would be impossible for it implies imperfection in the Godhead..)

Consequently, this little excursion, into what Jesus did not say, brings to our attention the fact that God is perfect, holy, righteous and just in all that He does. Therefore, since our Lord knows this, what Jesus is saying is that the Son is sanctifying Himself, not so God can do something *truly*, in a perfect and whole sense, but, rather, that the Son is sanctifying Himself, so that God can even do the sanctifying of us at all, for He never acts contrary to who He is!

The NIV implies that the Father will sanctify the disciple, no matter what, even if the Son does not sanctify Himself, but, in order to insure that the Father’s act of sanctification will be a true sanctification, the Son will sanctify Himself. But the truth of the matter is, Jesus is saying He is sanctifying Himself because that is the only way the Father can sanctify a

Christian at all! The Father cannot sanctify any Christian if the Son does not first sanctify Himself. Why is that?—because God is righteous, perfect, and just and the only way He could righteously sanctify anyone, is that blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sins, and the only blood that could cleanse and forgive our sins is the blood of the LORD Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel! He sanctified Himself, not so the Father could then sanctify us truly, in a true manner, but He sanctified Himself, so the Father could even sanctify us at all!

Hebrews 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; ¹² Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. KJV

Hebrews 10:4-7 For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. ⁵Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: ⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure. ⁷ Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. KJV

And this brings us full circle back to the phrase “in truth,” in verse 19, and the way it is correctly translated by the KJV, the NKJV and the NASB.

Because the Holy Spirit switches from the articular phrase sanctify them “in the truth” in verse 17, to an anarthrous phrase, sanctify them “in truth” in verse 19, the Holy Spirit is obviously making a distinction between the two. Why? I think it is because of what we said at the beginning.

God does also use Scripture to sanctify us, but because of the use of the definite article and the possessive pronoun used in verse 17, that verse was primarily speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Word which was with God, and the Word which was God, and the One who was “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” But now with this anarthrous use of the noun “truth,” we see that John is not pointing to the mere identity of Truth, but is now pointing to the essential quality of truth. In the Greek language many times this use of the articular noun and an anarthrous noun can indicate a different nuance of the noun.

As I mentioned in another book, Dana and Mantey, in their *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* say speak to this important grammatical usage:

“The articular construction emphasizes the identity; the anarthrous construction emphasizes the character.”⁵⁷

“An object of thought may be conceived of from two points of view: as to identity or quality. To convey the first point of view the Greek uses the article; for the second the anarthrous construction is used. “...We adopt Robertson’s conclusion that it is more accurate to speak of the “absence” of the article than the “omission” of the article. When we use “omission” we imply “that the article ought to be present” ... while as a matter of fact it ought not to be, because the writer was seeking to convey an idea which the use of the article would not have properly represented.”⁵⁸

In other words, when one has an article present, and then not present, in any particular phrase, it is done to convey a specific thought. In another place they provide an example of this Greek usage of the article by referring to its use in John 1:1, where it is present in the first use of the word “God” in the sentence and then absent in the next use of the word “God” in the sentence.

“There is no definite rule governing the use of the article with *Theos*, so that sometimes the writer’s viewpoint is difficult to detect, which is entirely true. But in the great majority of instances the reason for the distinction is clear. The use of θεός in Jn. 1:1 is a good example. πρὸς τὸν θεόν points to Christ’s fellowship with the person of the Father; θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος emphasizes Christ’s participation in the essence of the divine nature.”⁵⁹

And so we see that the Holy Spirit’s use of the article with *Truth* in verse 17 points the reader to the Person of our Lord, and the absence of the article with the noun *truth* in verse 19 point us to that which is essentially *truth*.

In other words, Jesus is saying that by His sacrifice upon the cross, and all that entails, as we have seen, we are sanctified by all that is truth, all that is essentially “truth,” which, obviously, would include the eternal

⁵⁷ Dana, H.E.; Mantey, Julius R., *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1957), pg. 140

⁵⁸ Ibid., pg. 149-50

⁵⁹ Ibid., pg. 140

Word of God which is truth. Whereas, verse 17 primarily pointed to the LORD Jesus Christ as the Truth, without disallowing Scripture to also be truth, verse 19 primarily points to Scripture as truth, without disallowing the LORD Jesus Christ to be the Truth.

By using the anarthrous use of “truth,” the Holy Spirit is saying all that is God’s truth will sanctify us, whether it is the LORD Jesus Christ, as we have already demonstrated, or it is Scripture, since it is the “word of truth!”

Psalms 119:160 The entirety of **Your word is truth**, And every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever. NKJV

II Corinthians 6:7 By the **word of truth**, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left KJV

Ephesians 1:13 In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the **word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise KJV

James 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the **word of truth**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. KJV

I Peter 1:25; 2:1-2 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. ^{2:1} Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, ² As newborn babes, **desire the sincere milk of the word**, that ye may grow thereby: KJV

But that is not all, dear brethren, the Holy Spirit Himself, is also Truth, for He is called the “Spirit of Truth,” and so we are also told we will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

John 15:26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the **Spirit of truth**, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: KJV

Romans 15:16 that I should be a minister of Christ Jesus unto the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, **being sanctified by the Holy Spirit** ASV

II Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through **sanctification of the Spirit** and belief of the truth: KJV

I Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but **ye are sanctified**, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, **and by the Spirit of our God**. KJV

1 Peter 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through **sanctification of the Spirit**, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. KJV

In fact, in one sense, our sanctification must entail all three, for consider this: Obviously, we need the first, for without the sacrifice of Christ we have nothing. But what if we have the first, but not the second? Without the Scripture, the *word of truth*, we would be open to deception and false doctrine, for we would have no abiding record of truth to turn to, which, in turn, would lead to division and separation of one Christian from another. So we need the second (Scripture) for our ongoing sanctification also. But what if we have the first and the second, but not the third? If we have our Lord's sacrifice, and we have Scripture, but we do not have the fullness of the Spirit, we could not walk by the Spirit, and if we cannot walk by the Spirit, we cannot not be filled with the fruit of the Spirit, and without the fruit of the Spirit, we are left with the flesh and our soulical mindsets to interpret Scripture, which, in turn, will lead to an untold number of different interpretations of Scripture, which our flesh and soulical mindsets will use to divide and separate us.

Without the filling, and the guidance, of the Spirit of God in our hearts, we will not be able to have the Spirit of Truth to interpret for us the *word of truth*, which, in turn, will bear witness to the Word that is the Truth, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Word of God. As such, the Holy Spirit will always bear witness to the oneness of the Son with the Father, which reveals to our hearts us the basis of our unity. So, all three aspects of sanctification are so important to the spiritual health of the Christian and the spiritual well-being of the Church.

Consequently, perhaps we can now see that when our Lord prays, "Sanctify them in Thy Truth, The Word *that is* Thine is Truth," we can see that the primary reason for our unity and oneness is because we are sanctified by God the Father" in" the LORD Jesus Christ, who is the Word and who is the Truth. But equally we also see that we have been given the precious Word of God, which is also called the "word of truth," as well as the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth, whereby are continually being sanctified so that we might grow up in all aspects into Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. I Thess. 4:3; 5:23; Heb. 2:11; 10:14; Eph. 4:11-32). Christ truly is all and in all—and that leads us to

the final portion of this prayer that speaks to God's principle of unity for His people, which is none other than the glory of the Son, to which we will now look.

The Glory of His Life—vs. 22-26

Verse 22—And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

This brings us back to our verse wherein we began this chapter, when we mentioned John's use of a "prophetic-perfect." Since it refers to a future event, it is as if the Lord prayed—"And the glory which you will give me, I will give to them." Of course, it should not be translated this way for the Holy Spirit did not choose the future tense, but a perfect tense, which should be faithfully maintained, but it certainly could be put into a side note of the verse that these perfects might be examples of the apostle John using Greek futuristic perfects.

And if that is so, we must ask ourselves as to how we receive that glory, and in what way that glory will make us "perfect in one," or as the NASB rendered it, that we "may be perfected in unity." But before we examine in what way we are given that same glory, and how that glory of His life makes us one, we must first ask ourselves, by all these usages of glory by our Lord in this prayer, what the word "glory" actually means.

Simply stated, glory is the outward evidence of an inward reality. For example, in the Old Testament it was said that the glory of the Lord shone forth like a consuming fire on top of Mount Sinai.

Exodus 24:17 And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of **the glory of the LORD** was like a **consuming fire** on the mountain top. NASB

In this account, the children of Israel understood that the LORD God was exacting and righteous in all His ways, so much so, that they asked Moses to take their place before the Lord because of the glory overwhelmed them (Deut. 5:4-5,27). They understood the glory of the Lord that shone forth was an exact expression of who He really was, and so they greatly feared the Lord. But the Old Testament also tells us that the same glory also expressed the LORD's goodness and mercy, resulting in their praise and thanksgiving.

II Chronicles 7:3 And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, **and the glory of the LORD** upon the house, they bowed themselves with

their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, *saying*, **For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.** KJV

Therefore, since glory is an outward manifestation of an inward reality, and both expressions of God's glory are an accurate revelation of who He really is, we see that God's exactness, i.e. His righteousness, must always be congruous with His mercy, and His mercy with His righteousness. The Psalmist bears witness to this truth in Psalm 85:9-10 this way—

Psalm 85:9 Surely His salvation *is* near to those who fear Him, That **glory** may dwell in our land. **Mercy** and **truth** have met together; **Righteousness** and **peace** have kissed. NKJV

And since the New Testament declares that the Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the Gospel of John declares that He became flesh and dwelt among us, one also sees both aspects of glory in our Lord—

Hebrews 1:3 And He is the **radiance of His glory** and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; NASB

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (**and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.** KJV

But there is another aspect to glory besides it being an expression of an inward reality. Scripture also declares that one's "position" expresses one's glory, and that one's position and one's glory must also reflect one's inward character. There is no dissimulation with God. In heaven, all things are transparent and congruous with truth. So if one sits in glory at the Father's right hand, that glory and position will be a perfect manifestation of the inward reality and essence of the one sitting by His side. It can be no other way for God is light and cannot abide darkness. If one's outward glory did not perfectly match one's inward character, God would never bestow a "position of glory," because God knows all things, and He does all things righteously and truthfully. As such, His throne is established on absolute righteousness.

Psalm 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before Thee. NASB

Beloved, God could never grant the “glory” of the throne of righteousness at His right hand to one who did not measure up to that glory and position, for to do so would mean that God would be declaring something false and misleading. And that is impossible for God to do (Heb. 6:18)!

Consequently, glory bespeaks not only one’s position before God, but also it bespeaks the inward truth or reality of that person. So what this shows us is this—if the glory is an expression of perfect righteousness, mercy and truth, then it is because the one, who is being glorified by God, is perfect, righteous, merciful and true.

Therefore, returning now to our verse wherein Jesus declares that He received glory from the Father during and after His incarnation (vs. 22), we see the only way the Father could give glory in accordance with His very nature, was to give glory to a Son that was perfect, pure and righteous and true in every way. Jesus was perfectly righteous in all things and so was the only one of all Mankind, who could be given such a position at God’s right hand.

Thus the Father justly gave His beloved Son glory at every stage and every aspect of His incarnation as the Son of Man. And since the Son of Man was none other than the Eternal Son of God who always possessed the eternal glory of God before the foundation of the world, the glory bestowed by God on His Son in His incarnation was an affirmation that He was, indeed, the Only-Begotten Son of God from all eternity, full of grace and truth, perfect and righteous in every way. And since Jesus also was speaking of the glory of His exaltation to the right hand of God, it means that the Lord Jesus was not only pure and holy in His life, but also in His death, burial, and resurrection, being the pure and Holy Son of God, who was very God of very God.

Luke 24:26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, **and to enter into his glory?** KJV

Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit **offered himself without spot to God**, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? KJV

Acts 2:27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, **neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.** KJV

Romans 1:4 And **declared to be the Son of God** with power, according to the spirit of holiness, **by the resurrection from the dead:** KJV

I John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know **Him who is true**, and we are in **Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God** and eternal life. NASB

Hebrews 7:26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, **holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens**; NASB

I Peter 1:20-21 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,²¹ Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, **and gave him glory**; that your faith and hope might be in God. KJV

Now we can begin understand the full import of our Lord's statement: "And the glory which Thou hast given Me, **I have given to them.**" But that brings up an important question as to how can Christ give to us His glory, if glory must be an accurate reflection of an inward truth or reality? Are we not all sinners? Do we not all fall short of the glory of God? In contradistinction to Christ Jesus, are we not all imperfect and completely unrighteous?

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. KJV

Remember, God is perfect and righteous in every way. It is impossible for Him to act with any dissimulation. Any glory bestowed by Him must be a perfect effulgence and expression of the sinless, perfect and righteous life of the one to whom it is granted. It can be no other way, for God is light and everything is open, consistent and true with Him with no darkness or shadow of turning.

James 1:16-17 Do not err, my beloved brethren.¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. KJV

And, because Jesus is true (very) God of true (very) God, as I John 5:20 declares, and because He is the exact image of His Person, the image of the invisible God, He also cannot act in any other way. He cannot bestow glory with dissimulation on someone, for He and the Father are one. So how can He give us His glory to us who are not sinless, who are not righteous, who are not perfect, who fall completely short of the glory of God? The answer is He cannot!

So now we can begin to understand the depths of our Saviour's love, mercy and grace, but also the depth of His complete righteousness. To

solve our dilemma the Lord needed to do something, for He can never act with dissimulation. The only way our Lord could justly give us His glory is to make us to be inwardly congruent with what would be shining forth outwardly! In light of this, how wonderful is this verse of Scripture.

II Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, **that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** NASB

The only way we could gain the glory of Christ is to have the same inward perfection of Christ. And what is that same inward perfection? It is none other than the imputed righteousness of Christ!

Romans 3:21-24 But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² *even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;* for there is no distinction; ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ²⁴ **being justified as a gift** by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. NASB

Romans 3:3, 23-25; 5:1 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ²² **And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.** ²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; ²⁴ **But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;** ²⁵ Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. **5:1 Therefore being justified by faith,** we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

And so we are told that Christ became our righteousness (I Cor. 1:30), for only in that way could we be given His glory. He justified us by faith so that we could be glorified, just as Scripture declares in Rom. 8:30. (The word “justified,” of course, means to be declared righteous.)

I Corinthians 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us** wisdom from God, and **righteousness** and sanctification, and redemption. KJV

Romans 8:30-32 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: **and whom he justified, them he also glorified.** ³¹ What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? ³² He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? KJV

Thus, because of the sanctification of Himself, wherein He shed His blood upon the cross, Jesus is able to grant to us the glory of His “life” on this earth, the glory of His dying upon the cross, the glory of His

resurrection from the grave, and the glory of His exaltation to the throne of God, all by giving “Himself” to us who believe, thereby becoming our righteousness. He grants us this glory, not for anything we are, or anything we have done, but for everything He is, and for everything He has done.

The glory of the Son of Man is the affirmation by God the Father of His sinless, perfect and righteous life upon this earth and His perfect obedience to the Father, even to the death upon the cross. And the glory we receive from the Lord Jesus Christ is an affirmation that all our sins are forgiven, that we are accepted in the Beloved, that we have been cleansed by His blood, having been born anew and having been made members of His body, of his bones and of his flesh, by the Spirit baptizing us into His body (Eph. 1:6; I Cor. 12:13; Eph.5:30 KJV) and that He has imputed to us His very righteousness. We receive of His glory, because He received us into Himself, and so has become unto us righteousness, and our hope of glory.

John 14:19-20 “After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you *will* behold Me; because I live, you shall live also.”²⁰ “In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, **and you in Me, and I in you.** NASB

I Corinthians 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, **and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.** KJV

Colossians 1:27 To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:** KJV

Colossians 3:4 When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then **shall ye also appear with him in glory.** KJV

And this brings us to the next declaration Jesus makes after mentioning that He has given us glory. It brings us to the reason why His glory perfects us in oneness or unity as shown in verse 23-24 of the last portion of our Lord’s High Priestly prayer, which we will now look into.

Verse 23-24—I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.²⁴ **Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.** KJV

Verse 23 now shows us that we are one because we all have the same glory of His life, which is none other than Christ Jesus our Lord dwelling in us, the hope of glory. His life includes all who He is, including His righteousness. God's true principle of unity for the Church is Christ Jesus our Lord! It is not our separation from evil, but is our separation unto His life! **The gift of Himself, the glory of His life, is our principle of unity.**

When Jesus mentions that He has given this same glory to His disciples, He is not referring to the eternal glory of His Divine Nature, for that could not be given to anyone else, for that glory is the evidence of His consubstantiality (homousios) with the Father, which only the Son and Holy Spirit possess.

No, what our Saviour is referring to is the glory associated with His incarnation—His death, burial, resurrection, as well as His exaltation, which is given to every child of God by virtue of His righteousness being imputed unto them, and by the virtue of the fact that they have received new life from Him. It is given by the virtue of their being baptized into the body of Christ, and by the virtue of their being in Christ and Christ being in them. Indeed, His glory is given to us by virtue of that great mystery of our unionization with Him, wherein we are made “members of His body, of His bones and of His flesh.”

Ephesians 5:27-32 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. ²⁹ For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: ³⁰ **For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.** ³¹ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ³² **This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.** KJV

As was mentioned earlier, the Son always had glory with the Father before the very foundation of the world, having been eternally begotten by God His Father—the Only Begotten Son of God, who has always dwelt within the bosom of the Father (John 1:18; 17:5) That glory is the glory Jesus referenced in John 17:5 (and was also referenced by John in John 1:14). That glory is the outward radiance of His eternal Deity. That is the glory of His Divine Nature.

But the Son of Man, who is God manifested in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16) also received glory from the Father in His incarnation, by His being born of the virgin Mary, by having a body miraculously prepared for Him in

the womb of the virgin by the Holy Spirit and by the overshadowing of the Most High, so that the Lord Jesus Christ could truly be of the seed of the woman, as prophesied from the very beginning (Gen. 3:15). In this He too received glory, which Scripture references in Heb. 2:7.

Hebrews 2:7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; **thou crownedst him with glory and honour**, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: KJV

This glory is the outward expression of His perfect Humanity that was pure, sinless, and fully righteous in every way. This is the glory of the Son of Man, and an affirmation that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Heb.13:8).

And so we see that the Son of God had glory with His Father in His eternal generation, being very God of very God. And, indeed, the Son of Man received glory from the Father in His earthly birth, being born of a virgin, being sinless and separate from sinners, and by faithfully finishing the work God gave Him to do, even when it meant being crucified upon a cross, and paying the debt of our sins.

Hebrews 2:9-10 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels **for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour**; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. ¹⁰ For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. KJV

Philippians 2:8-9 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and **became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.** ⁹ **Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him**, and given him a name which is above every name: KJV

This subsequent glory is the glory of His life, and is the evidence of His perfect humanity and the witness of His complete fulfillment of the Law, and, so is an affirmation of His perfect righteousness. And, by God's grace and love, this perfect righteousness is imputed to us by faith, so that His glory might be given to us—Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Man of Sorrows," what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we,
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full redemption—can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die,
“It is finished!” was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high;
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,
To His kingdom us to bring,
Then anew this song we’ll sing
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Philip P. Bliss

And so beloved, this now reveals to us why the glory of our being joined to the Lord, wherein He is in us and we are in Him, makes us one, just as the Father and the Son are eternally one.

As we have seen, the Father and Son are one for they both possess the one and same Divine Substance. That is how the Father and Son are one. The Son and the Father are one through consubstantiality. So if Jesus prays that we may be one as He and the Father are one, Jesus is praying that we (every believer) may be one with each other through consubstantiality, but a consubstantiality of our own common substance, if you will, given to us by God, not the Divine Substance, for only the Son and Holy Spirit can possess the one Divine Substance of the Father. But if we are one as they are one, we must possess a common or same substance, for consubstantiality is the only way oneness occurs.

And so, since our Lord prays that we may be one, even as He and the Father are one, it must mean that every Christian must possess one *common substance*, in order to be one. So, if that is true, what is that common substance?—the answer is found in I John 5:11-12. It is His Life! That is what we all share in common and all equally possess.

John 5:11-12 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² **He that hath the Son hath life;** *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. KJV

Again, it is important to note that as human beings, “our” one and the same substance is not the substance of God, the one Divine Substance of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. That could never be, for if it was, it would mean we would be equal with God, which would be heretical. **No, no, no!**—our one and the same substance, so to speak, is Christ Jesus our Lord. It is none other than having Christ Jesus Himself dwell in our hearts—He who becomes to us all things. Paul speaks of this in I Cor. 1:30—”But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” It is having the Son in us, for “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (I John 5:12). Christ indwells every believer and so becomes (in a limited analogous sense, for the analogy like any type or parable must not be stretched too far) our own type of consubstantiality with each other that unites us just as he prayed.

He sanctified Himself so that we could indwell Him and He could indwell us, and by His indwelling we could be made one. Our common substance, so to speak, is His Life, the life of the Son of God who became flesh, and died on the cross for our sins, and who rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God on high, wherein we have been given a position of glory by His being in us, and by ourselves being in Him.

Now, I must admit, our oneness with Him is a great mystery, just as Paul declared in Eph. 5:30-32. Truly, logic is not always needed to believe certain truths in Scripture. Some biblical doctrines are simply beyond our human understanding. Indeed, some miracles in Scripture are completely beyond our human understanding and are completely illogical to our current level of knowledge; for example, can one logically explain how the sun’s shadow could go backwards in Isaiah 38:8! Or, we could use the example of the virgin birth. How did it actually work (Luke 1:35)? We know the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Highest overshadowed her, but what actually do those two terms mean? The answer is we do not know, but that does not mean we cannot believe the virgin birth is true by faith. It is the same with this great mystery of our unionization with Christ Jesus. We do not need to fully understand how we are one with Him, of His flesh and of His bones; but we do need to

believe it is true by faith. We cannot go wrong if we just say what Scripture says and no more—"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11 KJV). You have Christ in you and I have Christ in me. By having the Son in you, you have the life and by having the Son in me, I have the same life. That is one of the reasons we can be one, just like He and the Father are one. They have a oneness among themselves, of which no man can enter. And we have a oneness among ourselves, of which no one from the world can enter. He and the Father are one by having the same substance, the one Divine Substance of the Godhead. We as Christians are one by having the same substance, so to speak, the glory of His Life!

He entered this world in the likeness of sinful flesh, to die for our sins, to cleanse us from all iniquity, to justify us by faith, to impute His righteousness to us, so we could receive Him in our hearts, whereby we could have the one and the same Son within us, so as to have the one and same Life, which is what brings to us a limited and analogous consubstantiality, which, in turn, is what makes us one and unified! This is a great mystery. This is our principle of unity. So let us bear witness to that wonderful gift of salvation. It is always best to not exceed what is written, but to simply affirm and be thankful for what God has said. Christ is in you and Christ is in me, and Christ is in every single believer throughout time and space, and that is the basis of our oneness, our unity!

You see, dear brethren, it is not as if Christ is divided up between us, wherein you have a little part of Christ and I have a little part of Christ. God forbid. As Paul says, "Is Christ divided?" (I Cor. 1:13). Indeed, not! The Christ in you is the same Christ that is in me. He is omnipresent. He has allowed us, not only to all be in Him, but he has also granted us to have Him in us! How that works I do not know, and it would be wrong to make any logical conjectures or conclusions regarding that precious truth. The safe thing to do is to simply repeat and believe the exact wording of Scripture—Christ is in us, our hope of glory.

Obviously, we are finite and so cannot contain an omnipresent Son. But in some mysterious way, which we must simply accept by faith, Scripture says that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17). Indeed, as Paul says, Christ is our hope of glory.

Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love. NASB

Colossians 1:26-27 *Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:* ²⁷ *To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.*** KJV

And so, beloved, according to Scripture we see we are one in Christ and by Christ. Our unity is Christ! This is why Paul declares in his epistle to the Romans that we should be one, “according to Christ.”

Romans 15:5-7 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, **according to Christ Jesus,** ⁶ **that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ **Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.** NKJV

In other words, he is telling us the reason we should keep the unity of the Spirit and to receive each other is because we have been received by Christ. He is telling us to be one and likeminded with each other according to Christ (i.e. in accordance with the Christ who is in us, who cannot be divided). The little phrase, κατὰ χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, which is translated “according to Christ Jesus” does not simply mean according to His example, but means in accordance with who He is as the Son. In other words, to put it another way, Paul is saying we should all live according to His life as he so succinctly declared in Galatians 2:20—

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. KJV

Thus, when we receive each other according to Christ, it means that, when we receive another Christian, it is to be in accordance with Christ’s reception of us. As such, we need to ask ourselves that if Christ Jesus was standing in our midst and one of His children comes into His presence, would Jesus receive that believer or turn His back on that believer. If Jesus would receive that believer and not turn His back on such a one, neither should we, and, if for some reason we do, it shows, despite our claims to the contrary, we are not living “in accordance with Christ,” in accordance with His Life, for if Christ receives Him so should we, if, indeed, we are submitting to Christ living through us!”

It is a serious thing to refuse a fellow believer’s participation in the Lord’s Table, for it is not our Table, but the Lord’s. And, if the Lord Jesus receives such a believer, but we do not, we are acting

presumptuously, and self-righteously, not keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

And what is so ironic is that when someone does not receive another Christian, one whom Christ does receive, all because of a faulty understanding of the meaning of separation from evil, we are actually introducing a different form of evil into the Assembly! Paul tells us to receive one another in accordance with Christ and to be likeminded with one another, i.e. to dwell together, ever keeping the true unity of the Spirit, with all lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearing love.

So what we see is that, indeed, we are one, just as the Father and the Son are one, just as Jesus prayed. But we should be careful to not think that somehow we become a part of His oneness with the Father. That is not what Jesus meant. Our oneness does not come from having the same substance of God, but by having the same substance of the glorious life of Christ Jesus our Lord given to us because His righteousness has been imputed to us all by the precious blood of the Lamb that was slain. And, just as within the Godhead, consubstantiality produces coinherence within the Three Persons, so too, our limited, but analogous consubstantiality with each other produces a limited coinherence with Christ (which also is not the same as His coinherence with the Father. It is simply a limited analogy), wherein He is the Head and we are His body. We are in Him and He is in us. And because we are in Him and He is in us, we must receive all those that Christ has received for Christ cannot be divided. This is God's principle of unity for the Church! Amen, dear brethren, and Hallelujah be unto Him!

Finally, we should mention that Scripture sometimes speaks proleptically of the glory we are to receive in the same way that Jesus spoke proleptically of the glory He was to receive. Sometimes Jesus spoke as if the glory had already been given, as we have now seen, and sometimes He still spoke of it as a future occurrence.

Luke 24:26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things **and to enter into His glory?**" NASB

In the same way, sometimes Scripture speaks of us already possessing the fullness of that future glory, as we have just discussed, and sometimes it speaks of it as still a future occurrence. So what we learn is that positionally, this glory is already ours, just as Jesus declared, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them." But, subjectively, it is still our hope of the future.

II Thessalonians 2:14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, **to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.** KJV

Colossians 1:27 To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, **the hope of glory.** KJV

But, in this light, we must not forget that the writer of Hebrews tells us that “faith is the substance of things **hoped** for, the **evidence** of things not seen (Heb. 11:1 KJV). Thus, that which is already ours positionally and spiritually in Christ Jesus can become ours on earth right now by faith. We are being changed into His image, from glory to glory based upon the finished work of Christ, but equally so, by faith, we are now able to experience that glory in our Christian lives.

Just as we mentioned before that the Holy Spirit purposely used a future perfect, rather than the simple future tense, to emphasize the normal perfect sense of the verb, as well as the future sense of the verb, without subtracting one from the other (thus also demonstrating the great faith of Jesus), so too, the certainty of our future glory can also now be possessed by us by our faith.

Faith allows that glory, which is our hope, to now be ours in the Church, that is, if we but walk now by faith. This is why Paul says in the same epistle of Colossians, where He reveals the Christ is in us—the hope of glory, that we should set our minds on things above and not on the things of earth. The things of earth will bring division. The things above in heaven, the reality of our position in Christ, will bring unity.

Colossians 3:1-3 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

The oneness and unity that we will have with Him in glory can now be ours in the Church by faith. There will be no divisions in heaven. There will be no denominations in our eternal home. We will all be one and dwell in perfect unity and communion forever and ever when we are fully glorified. But that reality can now be ours by faith! Faith is the “substance” of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb.11:1)! The word translated “substance,” bespeaks the “reality” of

what otherwise cannot be seen. It bespeaks our present possession or manifestation of that which others cannot know.

In the first chapter of Hebrews (Heb. 1:3) the same word is translated “Person,” being used of the Father. It declares that the Son is the very image of His Person. He is the image of the invisible God. Literally, the basal meaning of that Greek word is— *that which exists down under*. It was originally used of sediment in water, which, while stirred, could not be “clearly” seen. However, once that sediment completely settled, it became “clearly” visible as a layer of sediment. Now, it always was there, but it just could not be clearly seen. However, when it settled to the bottom, it became the visible **evidence** of what was always there. In the same way, the Divine Substance of the Father is unseen, but the Son is the visible subsistent of the Father’s Divine Substance. The Father was in the Son and the Son was in the Father, but the Son brings visibility to all that the Father is. In the same way, our faith brings visibility to all that we are, to all that has always been there, to all that is already ours positionally in Christ, which obviously includes our oneness and unity. It brings into our experience those things which are hoped for, because Scripture says they are already ours in Christ!

Thus in eternity we will all dwell together in glory in unity, but that truth can now become a reality, being seen by the world in each local Church, if we all but walk by faith. And that faith is maintained by setting our minds on things above and not on the things below. A mind set on things above, brings oneness and unity in faith. A mind set on things below, brings nothing but discord, division and heartache.

Why is there so much division in the body of Christ?—because we have lost our walk of faith! We are not living according to our position in Christ, our hope of glory! We do not see ourselves as crucified with Christ; so we do not let Christ live in us. Instead, because of our refusal to take up our cross and deny ourself, we live by our own carnal, religious, and soulical life. Such a life and walk will always be short on faith, and so, will always be short on forgiveness, and so will always be short on unity. Such a life will always see the tiniest mote in our brother’s eyes, but never see the obvious beam in our own eye!

As we mentioned before, A. N. Groves once succinctly said it this way—

“However, the moment we abandon this principle of receiving all who Christ receives because of our possession of the common life of Jesus, and, rather, adopt a position of separating ourselves from other brethren, with a mindset that “only” preaches against their errors with words, (that is errors or doctrines that

have nothing to do with the essential doctrines of the Faith), then, at that moment, every Christian, or every group of Christians will become suspect. The first thought in our mind will become, “What needs to be set straight in our brother’s life, or, what false interpretation needs to be corrected.” No longer will it be enough to examine whether or not they are Christians, rather a standard will be set up where all their conduct and principles will first have to be examined and approved before they can be received. This mindset will inevitably lead to the most bigoted and narrow-minded in our midst becoming the judges of all. Why? Because it’s not in the nature of a bigoted and narrow-minded conscience to yield. Thus, those among us with an open and enlarged heart will find themselves forced to yield to the strictures of such narrow-minded consciences... but in all this I would INFINITELY RATHER BEAR *with all their errors*, than be required to SEPARATE from THEIR GOOD!”⁶⁰

And he once said this—

“If my Lord should say to me, in any congregation of the almost unnumbered sections of the Church, “What dost thou here?” I would reply, “Seeing Thou wert here to save and sanctify, I felt it safe to be with Thee.” If He again said, as perhaps He may among most of us, “Didst thou not see abominations here, an admixture of that which was unscriptural, and the absence of that which was scriptural, and in some points error, at least in your judgment?” my answer would be, “Yea, Lord, but I dared not call that place unholy where Thou wert present to bless, nor by refusing communion in worship reject those as unholy whom Thou hadst by Thy saving power evidently sanctified and set apart for Thine own.”⁶¹

We even find our brother Darby, who departed from these original principles of the brethren, once saying the same things—for these were the original principles of unity that the Holy Spirit showed to those early brethren. He once declared:

“Whenever the first great truth of redemption in a word, whenever Christ has received a person, we would receive him. That false brethren *may creep in unawares* is possible. If the Church be spiritual, they will soon be made apparent, but as our table is the Lord’s, not ours, we receive all that the Lord has received, all who have fled as poor sinners for refuge to the hope set before them, and rest not in themselves, but in Christ, as their hope. We then afterwards teach them as they are able, according to the grace, and knowledge, and wisdom we have received—all the truth we have received at God’s hands; and here it is

⁶⁰ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 11-12, 13

⁶¹ A. N. Groves, *Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves: containing extracts from his letters and journals 2nd edition*, (James Nisbet, London, 1857) pg.535

that ministry comes in. We do not make a creed, **but Christ, the ground and term of union**; but trusting to the help and ever-watchful and ready care of the Lord over us, and the true and real presence of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, seek and give all the instruction, exhortation, comfort, and when need arises rebuke in love, we are enabled. **One may lay the foundation, and all that are on it we receive**, and another build thereon; and they must take heed how they build thereon. You may say, ‘But there will be false teachers.’ So God has taught us, and all your plans will not prevent it; but the grace of God will overrule it, enable us to detect them by the word, and turn it to good... There will be heresies there must needs be, says the Apostle, that they which are approved may be made manifest.”⁶²

So, how sad it is that he departed from this principle of unity and, instead, invented his own theory of separation from evil as the principle of God’s unity, which he then made into the Church’s principle of oneness and unity, which ending up adversely affecting the unity of the Spirit being manifested among so many brethren.

His theory has produced nothing but heartache and division, and even unto today there are some, who still follow his principle, and who still will not receive certain brethren, who are received by Christ. Some still follow his thinking, separating from the evil that they see in others, while not be able to see the evil within their own hearts. Such ones cause divisions, thinking that they alone are the ones maintaining the purity and unity of the Church. Some even still think that they are the only true Church in an area because they are the only ones who truly separate from the evil they see in other believers, even from other believers, who also practice the same theory of separation from evil, but not to the same extreme as they do! Such thinking ignores the cleansing power of the blood, the imputed righteousness of Christ, the wonderful glory of His Life, and the ongoing sanctification of the Spirit, wherein the evil in us all, to a greater or lesser degree, is dealt with by our Father in heaven.

It is most sad, dear brethren, for it ignores the apostle Paul’s pleas to the saints to keep the unity of the Spirit with lowliness of mind, meekness of heart, and forbearance of love in the bond of peace—all qualities that would certainly be manifested, if we remain faithful to walk in Spirit and to walk by faith, and to live by the glory of His Life that makes us one. May God forgive us all for our failures in this.

⁶² Kelly, James; Darby, J. N., *The Claims of the Church of England Considered; Being the Close of a Correspondence Between the Rev. James Kelly of Stillogan, Ireland, and J.N. Darby* (W. H. Broom, London, 1864), pg. 65-66

And so this now brings us to the final verses of our Lord's High Priestly prayer in regard to our oneness with Him and our oneness or unity with each other—verses 25-26.

**Verse 25-26—O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.
²⁶ And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. KJV**

Paul once wrote, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (1 Cor. 13:13 KJV). How apropos that Paul ends with the word charity, i.e. love. It was greater than faith and greater than hope. And, in Eph. 4:1-3, it was also the very last characteristic needed in his plea for Christian unity, when he asked Christians to always be forbearing toward one another in love.

As such, we see that Paul's wisdom in both of these verses was nothing but a fulfilment of our Lord's prayer to the Father in the last few verses of John 17. Our Lord ended His High Priestly prayer with a prayer that the infinite love of God might be in every believer, for He knew that the true love of the Father and the true love of Himself would be that which would temper our zeal, purify our hearts, and keep us all walking in love and oneness with each other. Love is the expression of the eternal oneness and communion of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. There is no selfishness, no self-assertiveness, and no self-love between the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. There is nothing but an eternal “selflessness” between them. All their love is focused outward toward each other, never inward toward themselves.

In that light, we know that when the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Only-Begotten Son of God, the Word who was with God, and the Word who was God, when He became flesh and dwelt among us, He was filled with nothing but utter “selflessness” and love for all.

And so because of that, we also know that, if He is living His life in us, there will be nothing but “selflessness” in us, so that the love in our hearts, which will be the love of His heart, will be that same love which can maintain the oneness brought about by the glory of His life given unto every disciple. If we are willing to deny our self (for we still have free will), take up our cross, and follow Him, His life will be expressed through us in love toward one another.

But without that life, our love will be stultified, only given out in measured doses to those who will agree with us. Beloved, that type of love will produce nothing but division and heartache, as it did with those who followed our brother Darby.

Our brother Darby's theory of "separation from evil," being the basis of the unity of the Spirit for the Church, all because he believed it was the very basis of the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is wrong and has produced nothing but a stultified love and a false zeal for the Lord. His theory is completely wrong; it bears false witness to the unity of the Godhead, and is a man-made tradition that has made the Word of God of none effect (Mark 7:13). It has produced false zeal for the Lord, and false zeal will always quench true love. False zeal is zealous for the Lord, but not according to knowledge. False zeal is that which appears holy, but, in reality, it is not, for it puts out fellow Christians from the Lord's table, which the Lord Himself, in love, has invited to His Table! It is a false zeal, for when one rejects and excommunicates those fellow Christians whom the Lord has not rejected or excommunicated, it is a rejection of the very righteousness of Christ Jesus within them. Such zeal may be filled with good motives, i.e. being zealous for the Lord, but, since it is based upon a false understanding of the oneness of Blessed Trinity, it ends up quenching the Spirit, and so ends us quenching true love, which in turn means that the "true" unity of the Spirit will never be able to be kept.

On the other hand, a true zeal for the Lord will always be filled with lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and a love that is forbearing, for it will be none other than the lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearing love of Christ within us! It will never reject those, whom the Lord is still receiving, for it will be a manifestation of the very same love of the Lord who is still receiving them, at that very moment we are thinking of rejecting them! It will be Christ's love within and through us, which is a love that covers a multitude of sins. Peter tells us of that love, for he well knew it, for it covered his own sin of failure, false witness, and unfaithfulness to the Lord.

I Peter 4:8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. NASB

Paul also knew that love, for it covered his sin of false witness and unjust persecution of the very LORD, he thought he was serving by his zeal (Acts 9:4). And so we see, that in accordance with our Lord's High

Priestly prayer, Pau also knew that the true love of the Lord, expressed outwardly in one's heart, was the only way the unity of the Spirit could ever be kept. Paul knew that type of forbearing love, do we?

Dear brethren, every time we unjustly refuse a fellow believer to the Lord's Table, whom the Lord does not refuse, we bear false witness against the Lord. We are declaring the Lord is rejecting this believer, whereas the Lord is actually doing the very opposite. This is a grave sin. To falsely excommunicate a Christian is a form of persecution against the Lord Himself, for, just as the Lord Jesus declared to Paul on the Damascus road, when you falsely persecute a Christian (which false excommunication certainly is) you are persecuting the Lord Jesus Himself (Acts 9:1-5).

The apostle Paul knew very well that his own love could fail, but he knew the Lord's love would never fail. He knew that the Lord would love the saints through him, for he was willing to count himself crucified with Christ, so that Christ could live out His glorious life in and through him in love for every believer.

The apostle Paul learned what true zeal for the Lord really is; he learned that true zeal is filled with true love, and that the true balance of zeal and love can only ever be found in one Person—Christ Jesus our Lord. As such, he knew full well the truth of this verse that the Holy Spirit inspired him to write—“And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (Col. 3:14 NASB). May we all imitate Paul, as he imitated the Lord, and so truly love one another in the truth and love of the Lord.

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”—**Ephesians 4:1-3**

The Unity of the Spirit Expressed in Fellowship

Philippians 4:15 And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, **no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving** but ye only. ASV

How is the unity of the Spirit expressed in fellowship? Paul mentions in the verse above that the idea of fellowship entails a “giving” and a “receiving” between believers. In this verse, this giving and receiving had to primarily do with things physical, but it did not exclude things spiritual. As such, one can see that fellowship involves a sharing and/or communication of those things which one possesses, whether of things financial or of things spiritual, as in spiritual gifts. This form of sharing and/or communication can occur on an individual level or on a collective level, as Phil 4:15 shows.

Regarding this mutual sharing on the collective level, Anthony Norris Groves once spoke of the saints’ *liberty* in such fellowship with each other, as well as certain *limits* in fellowship with each other in certain situations, and then the *extent* of such fellowship. Let me provide his helpful thoughts regarding this manner:⁶³

“These, then, were the principles of our separation and intercommunion with other Christians, and/or Christian groups; we had resolved never to try to get them to accept what we accepted, or see what we could plainly see, further than they FELT they could in their own consciences. We resolved never to try to get them to accept our views either by condescending frowns or smiles—a frown when they would not agree with us, or a condescending smile, when they would acquiesce to our views; and this was resolved for one simple reason, we saw we had no authority from God to act in such a manner.

“Additionally, nothing in our experience ever led us to feel such would be the best means of promoting their blessing, or of bringing about our desired goal of Christian unity and uniformity of judgment. In

⁶³ These quotes are from a letter written to J. N. Darby that has been updated to modern syntax and language. The original letter can be found unchanged in the same book that will be referenced below.

fact, we found that adopting such an attitude actually created an outlet for the proclivities of the flesh (all under a guise of spiritual authority and zeal for the truth). But in all these matters, we always desired our way might be bright as light, and our words might drop noiselessly as the dew, and if, at the last, our brethren remained “otherwise minded,” we would simply seek God, and pray that He, Himself, might be the One to reveal it to them one day.

But, instead, what is now developing in your midst is a mindset that is no different than that which you once opposed; it is almost as if when weak, you could be generous and open, but now that you have gained strength and grown, you are allowing the same spirit of sectarianism to spring up within your midst. The idea now binding you together is this: “Is a fellow believer one of us?” That has become your overriding bond; whereas, before, the overriding bond was simply this—the oneness of life—the oneness that was based upon the power of God’s life residing in the soul of every believer....”⁶⁴

“But the moment your position changed and you separated yourself not only from their error, but also from their good, the moment you produced a complete rejection of them (because of the errors of their system), without any discrimination between their good and the evil, you no longer had their consciences or their hearts with you. They felt you had set yourself up over them as judge and jury (even though you were just a brother, like them, in the Father’s house). They felt that you began to act more like a father, than a brother in a father’s house, and that you began to exercise the Father’s power, without the Father’s heart of mercy...”⁶⁵

“There is no truth more established in my own mind than this: if one wishes to have the most power in leading fellow believers out of error and into truth, one must stand before those brethren as one who is genuinely filled with the desire that they grow in grace (rather than being one who simply stands before them always judging their motives and slightest failures)—this proves to them that your heart is given over to them with a love that will cover a multitude of sins. It also proves to them that you have their best interest at heart, and that your heart is not simply filled with righteous and arbitrary judgments.”⁶⁶

“Did you know, dear brother, that some will not have me hold communion with the Scotts, because their views are not satisfactory

⁶⁴ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836* (Updated Version) (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 13-14

⁶⁵ Ibid., pg. 15

⁶⁶ Ibid., pg. 16

about the Lord's Supper? Others will not have me hold communion with you, because of your views about baptism! And others will not have me join in fellowship with those from the Church of England, because of her thoughts about ministry. But based upon my principles of communion, I receive them all; but based upon your principle of witnessing against error, I must reject them all (including you!).

"Now, I do find each one, in certain particulars, sinning against the revealed mind and heart of Christ; they are allowing in their churches, in principle, the most tremendous disorders, but it is not for me to measure the comparative sin of one kind of disobedience against another. And because of that, I make full use of my fellowship of Spirit to enjoy our common life together. And, because I base my fellowship on that common life of God, that life that is found in every believer, I find that I have many opportunities, not only to bear witness to the truth, but also to set before them those errors—those very small particulars into which, notwithstanding all their grace and faithfulness, and all their godliness and honesty—they have fallen.

"I shall never feel that separation from the good in other believers (because of certain errors), to be the best way of witnessing against those errors, that is, until I see infinitely clearer, than I do now, that that is God's desired way.

"Naturally, I will always unite together in a constant and fixed fellowship with those in whom I see and feel the life and power of God most fully manifested. But, at the same time, I will always be free to visit and to minister to brethren in other churches, where, indeed, I might find much disorder, just as I will always be free to visit the houses of my friends, friends who might not govern their households in the same way that I might govern them. And it is for this reason, as I have previously stated, I would feel it equally unreasonable and unkind for any brother to judge me for the former kind of "visit," as I would if he judged me for the latter kind of "visit" (though, of course, I would never deny him the perfect liberty to judge such issues for himself)." ⁶⁷

"In Theory nothing can be more simple and apparently true, then, that if you are all 'baptized into one body,' by one Spirit, you ought to speak the same thing, and be of the same judgment; but in fact, nothing is more certain than that, notwithstanding the unity of the body and the unity of the baptism, this is not, and never has been the case: we must therefore, in a multitude of cases, leave every man to be 'fully persuaded in his own mind.' In smaller matters, this will be easy; in graver, it will be better to form small separate households of faith in love, each

⁶⁷ Ibid., pg. 18-19

preserving their conscience inviolate, than that either party should coerce others into their views and opinions.

“Uprightness of conscience is essential to all spiritual prosperity, but coercion into some judgment is not. Infinitely better is it for each household of faith to seek to walk in all things well-pleasing to the Lord, than to undertake the management and direction of other households.

“The unity of the national family is not destroyed by each household acting for itself, as long as all act for the welfare of the nation, and within its appointed laws; and even if these are transgressed, every individual cannot take the place of judge, but those to whom it is appointed by the king. If those who judge can show the king's commission for pronouncing sentence upon another man's servant, and calling him to the bar, well; they all have the right of passive judgment, namely, by withdrawing from him, or from any household of faith, if they think he or it is walking against the will of their Lord, but here I consider their authority ends; and certainly, for myself, I could not exercise more; nor should I feel called upon to submit to more, except from the household of faith to which I more immediately belonged; to them I would concede much, and from them be subject to much more.

“What I mean is this, if all the households of faith in England were to unite in bidding me cease teaching, I should consider their authority nothing, if my conscience stood clear in the matter; but if the household to which I felt myself called to minister were to desire me to cease, I should at once feel it right to do so, notwithstanding any clearness in my own conscience as to their being in error in their judgment. I think the mode of pressing unity adopted by some, is most absurd.”⁶⁸

As can be seen, he mentions that this fellowship reflects the common life we share with all brethren because we are one Body, and, indeed, one family (being of the one household of God). But, as with any body that is sick, or any household that has disagreements, what is to be done when one part of the body is sick and it is causing harm to other members of the body, or, what is to be done when some members of the household hold to things that will harm other members of the household?

⁶⁸ Mrs. Harriet Groves (Baynes), *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves: compiled chiefly from his journals and letters; to which is added a supplement, containing recollections of Miss Paget, and accounts of missionary work in India, etc.*, 3rd Edition (James Nisbet, London 1869) Pg. 441-442

Because of that question, spiritual discernment must ever be used to determine when our fellowship with other Churches can be beneficial to the flock, and when such fellowship can be detrimental to the flock, if not in this generation, then most assuredly in the next generation (for error creeps forward slowly).

So, obviously, in our practice of fellowship with other local Churches, sometimes there might also be need to be a limit of our fellowship, not an exclusion, but a limit, which, in turn means each Assembly has been given the liberty to determine when such limits should apply, and, which also means that there will always be limits of expression in our fellowship. And so, it is to these principles of fellowships that we would now like to discuss.

Liberty of Judgment in Fellowship

As we just said, spiritual discernment must ever be used in regard to our fellowship with any of the other many local Churches in the world, for each Assembly is responsible (if the Lord tarries) for insuring the spiritual well-being of the next generation in their midst. As such, an Assembly should not so lightly overlook any departures from the Bible practiced by other Churches if such close fellowship might cause the departure to spread to those within their own Assembly. This principle is given to us in Rev. 2:22-25, where the Lord warns Christians of the danger of being in fellowship with those who were represented by the imagery of Jezebel. But equally so, we must ever recognize that we are all brethren of the Lord, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and born again into the household of God and so are commanded by the Holy Spirit to receive all whom the Lord receives. This principle is given to us in Rom. 15: 7; I Cor. 10: 16-17 with I Cor. 11: 18-29 & 27-29. We have no right to limit fellow believers to the Lord's Table who have not been limited by the Lord (thinking we are somehow protecting the sanctity of the Lord's Table).

So the question becomes how do we keep a balance between the two? To answer that question we must first realize that each Assembly has the liberty to judge this issue for themselves. It is wrong to assume that one Assembly can make this judgment for another, or that one set of elders, or one set of leading brothers (or even just one Christian leader) can overrule the decisions of elders or leaders from another Assembly. Each

local Assembly is the Lord's, not ours. It is solely under His authority. As such, He has determined that each Assembly be shepherded by a group of elders who are a part of that local Assembly, and not by elders from other localities or Assemblies, nor, indeed, even by workers or apostles, who were involved in a ministry that was extra-local. Apostles could exhort, admonish, rebuke, etc., but the ultimate decisions of an Assembly belonged to the elders who were vested by the Lord as His under-shepherds. Apostles in Scripture had a spiritual and moral authority, which authority every Assembly was always exhorted, not only respect, but also to obey, especially in those Assemblies who had no elders yet appointed by the Lord. But once the Holy Spirit appointed elders for those Assemblies, each Assembly was commended to the Lord, which meant the authority for that Assembly's decisions was then entrusted to those local elders.

As such, Paul affirms, as an apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that he does not "lord" it over the faith of the saints in an Assembly. If Corinth would have rejected Paul's admonitions, they would have been wrong, for he was an apostle of Christ, but Paul refrained from lording it over them, for he trusted in the Chief Shepherding of the Lord Jesus Christ over His Churches. This meant he trusted the Lord to discipline the Church, if they ignored His admonitions as an apostle. There was not a hierarchical authority structure of one Church over another Church, or one apostle over many other Churches that was set up to enforce their commands. An apostle's authority was a spiritual authority, not a hierarchical authority. Such a mindset of recognizes the liberty of the saints, though, it requires faith in the ultimate presence of Christ to shepherd His sheep.

This meant that each and every Assembly is free in Christ, and, because of that truth, they are commanded by Paul to stand fast in that liberty!

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. KJV

We must remember that this verse is addressed to all the Churches in the province of Galatia, not simply to individuals in that province. It is addressed to local Assemblies, made up with Christians gathering together in the name of the Lord. So, in Gal. 5:1, he is telling local Assemblies to "stand fast" in the liberty that is theirs in Christ Jesus! This speaks of Church autonomy and independence before the Lord.

Galatians 1:1-2 Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) ² And all the brethren which are with me, **unto the churches of Galatia.** KJV

Paul clearly shows that his epistle regarding this liberty in Christ is addressed collectively to every Church in Galatia. He is exhorting each Assembly to stand fast in the liberty of Christ and not allow men (including those who might claim to be apostles) from without their local Assembly to intimidate them, to threaten them with excommunication, or to bring them under a yoke of bondage. The Greek verb translated as “stand” is plural in number and could be accurately translated as “stand ye fast,” so that Paul would be saying to each Church in Galatia, “Stand ye fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.”

And so, Gal. 5:1 becomes the basis upon which each Church must stand, whenever one Assembly might try to exert their authority over other Assemblies, trying to create a form of hegemony over them. This is what was happening to the Churches in Galatia; certain ones from the Assembly in Jerusalem were trying to create a form of hegemony over other Assemblies with Jerusalem being the one Assembly to which other Assemblies must submit to, as the mother Church. In that light, Paul commands each Assembly in Gal. 5:1 to stand fast in their liberty and not to submit to such intimidation. And it is no different today. ⁶⁹

It is most unfortunate that this mindset, whereby one Assembly seeks to control another Assembly has not ceased; it has continued down through the centuries, and was manifested once more in the mindset of our brother Darby, continuing even unto the present century.

(Again, please forgive me for using our brother as an example. But as was mentioned before in the chapter “The Problem of Manifesting the Unity of the Spirit Down through the Centuries,” we are using him (and those early brethren) as an example because he was one of the foremost Christians in modern times who so earnestly sought to follow Scripture in regard to manifesting the unity of the Spirit in a practical way. It is unfortunate that in this he failed, first by abandoning the New Testament Church principle he once followed with the other brethren in those early days, and then by his subsequent adoption of new principles of association (which in reality was not new but a variation of the old mindset he once possessed in the Church of England and Ireland. In this

⁶⁹ For a fuller understanding of this attempt of hegemony by some Christians from the Church of Jerusalem see page 241ff. in Volume I of this book.

regard, we ourselves today, who also seek to manifest the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, can well learn from his mistakes, so as to not make the same ones, as none of us are infallible. So even though we must examine the erroneous teaching of our brother in this regard, we should not let that obscure all the good things our brother did teach!)

It seems this mindset was manifested in our brother Darby, because he developed a false view regarding what Scripture expects and commands in regard to our oneness being expressed in fellowship. Unfortunately, he and those with him followed a mindset, on this one point, at least, that was somewhat similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church's viewpoint that oneness of the Body of Christ should be expressed world-wide through every Church's submission to their authority and guidance, that is, as it was represented in Rome. (Of course, it goes without saying that our brother Darby never countenanced any of the other errors and evils of the Roman Catholic Church, but rather was a champion against them.) If you remember, our brother Darby revealed a similar mindset of submission in one of his letters we have already mentioned.

I take part in this act, **and hold him to be outside the Church of God on earth, being outside (in either case) what represents it in [London];** I am bound by Scripture to count him so. I come to [Sheffield]; **there he breaks bread, and is in what? Not in the Church of God on earth, for he is out of it in [London],** and there are not two churches on earth, cannot be, so as to be in one and out of another. How can I refuse to eat with him in [London] and break bread with him in [Sheffield], have one conscience for [London], and another conscience for [Sheffield]; believe the Spirit judges one way at [London], and another for [Sheffield]. It is confusion and disorder.⁷⁰

Then he continues and addresses a question in regard to whether the conscience of another Assembly is bound by the decision made by the brethren in London.

“But before I go further on this point, allow me to recur to your letter. You say, Your arguments are without force if the act of the [London] brethren are not in accordance with the Lord's will; they could not in that case be by His authority; and this it is which has been the question with us. Who is the judge of whether these acts were so or not? This only means that you at___ consider yourselves

⁷⁰ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 257 (All names in brackets, with this quote and the next, have been supplied to bring continuity; in the second edition of letters the names were left blank, or as in the case of London, simply had the letter L. Also brackets are included to provide additional information.)

competent to judge the brethren in [London], though you were not there to know what passed, nor, allow me to think, have not in any way been fully informed of what took place. You must forgive me if I think this somewhat questionable. **You will say, ‘Are our consciences to be bound by the action of the brethren in [London]?’ I answer, ‘*primâ facie*, certainly, or there can be and is no common action.’”**

[Forgive me for interjecting my own words at this point in our quote by brother Darby, but because of the importance of this Latin phrase *primâ facie*, I thought it important to provide the reader a clear definition of that phrase, as it indicates the thought process and belief of our brother as he was a trained lawyer, before he was ordained a curate in the Anglican Church, and so before he ever ministered, subsequently, among so many Assemblies. *Primâ facie* is a Latin term that literally means “first appearance,” or “first sight.” A modern 21st century explanation of the legal term states that there are two common ways to understand the term—“On the one hand it can mean “*at first sight*: at first appearance, at first view, **before investigation**. On the other hand it can mean ‘plain and clear’: self-evident, obvious, a case in which the evidence produced is sufficient to enable a decision or verdict to be made **unless the evidence is rebutted**.”⁷¹ As one can see, both understandings still indicate that the *primâ facie* evidence is open for investigation, and/or rebuttal by other evidence. With a *primâ facie* case, judgment or a verdict cannot be rendered, if equal opportunity is not given, for further investigation, or if equal weight and objective consideration is not given to any evidence that may refute the original claim. An early judicial definition from 1904 states: “A *primâ facie* case is that amount of evidence which would be sufficient to counterbalance the general presumption of innocence, and warrant a conviction if not then encountered and controlled by evidence tending to contradict it and render it improbable, or to prove other facts inconsistent with it...*Prima facie* evidence...is such evidence as, in the judgment of the law, is sufficient to establish the fact, and, if not rebutted, remains sufficient for that purpose.”⁷² With this brief interjection included for explanation, let us now continue with his quote]

“I admit remonstrances—and if it comes to an absolute necessity through deliberate wrong—breaking with a gathering, but slighting the judgment of another body in ordinary cases is denying its being competent to decide for Christ and with Christ, and asserting your own competency to judge it without being acquainted with what passed. You say, ‘We have our own responsibilities to the Lord; others cannot measure them.’ What are you doing as to [London]? You have set aside the judgment of [London] as null and nought before the

⁷¹ Baudouin Dupret, Michael Lynch, Tim Berard, eds., *Law at Work: Studies in Legal Ethnomethods*, *Oxford Studies in Language and Law* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2015)Pg. 276

⁷² Editorial Staff, *Judicial and Statutory Definitions of Words and Phrases*, *Volume 6* (West Publishing Company, St. Paul, 1904) pg. 5549

Lord. You do not say the individuals have not the Spirit, but you have rejected their corporate action. How can the two bodies get on together? You receive a person because he is in communion in [London], that is, you own the body as a competent witness of Christ's mind, without saying it is infallible. You own the body, its acts; you wish to be in communion with it; you must then recognize its other acts. **I recognise the full liberty in you, as having also the Spirit** as a part of Christ's body, led to act by it, in remonstrating or enlightening, **but not to disown it on your own authority**, and then to pretend to own it still, and speak of being in communion with it....You must not deceive yourselves, dear brother; where Christ is in question there is no middle ground. You have separated yourselves from the brethren in the course you have taken; you think yourselves wiser than they.”⁷³

As one can see, he remonstrates with them, saying, “Who is the judge of whether these acts were so or not? This only means that you at___ consider yourselves competent to judge the brethren in [London], though you were not there to know what passed, nor, allow me to think, have not in any way been fully informed of what took place.”

As such, he then questions the liberty of other Assemblies, specifically the one Assembly he addresses, which we will label Assembly (B), to disagree with the judgment of another Assembly, meaning the one Assembly in London, which we will label Assembly (A), saying, “...slighting the judgment of another body in ordinary cases is denying its being competent to decide for Christ and with Christ, and asserting your own competency to judge it without being acquainted with what passed.”

But what is missing in all of our brother's remonstrations is consistency. He disallows the liberty of Assembly (B) to judge an issue before the Lord because he says they were not there, and so were not acquainted with what passed. And yet our brother repeatedly called into question the judgments of other Assemblies (letters B-Z, so to speak), without his ever being there. What he disallows to other Assemblies, he allows to himself and to London, which means he should never criticize Assembly (B) for making a judgment from a distance, as he often did!

Besides, in this example above, even though Assembly (B) might not be fully acquainted with what passed in Assembly (A), they usually have some facts regarding what passed. And if their facts are one-sided and so

⁷³ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 258-259

are not correct, cannot Assembly (B), which is gathered together in the Name of the Lord, still be guided by the Holy Spirit, and so be shown in their spirits that either something is wrong with the facts they have, so they should not make a judgment about the issue, or, conversely, on the other hand, could not the Holy Spirit still make known to them in their spirits, even without all the facts at hand—that certain decisions by that the other Assembly (A) were actually wrong because they exceeded the parameters of Scripture? After all the Holy Spirit has all the facts, and so is able to make known to Assembly (B), which is gathered in the Name of the Lord that the decisions of that Assembly (A) were actually wrong. And with that being the case, the Holy Spirit could bear witness to the spirits of those brethren in Assembly (B) that something about the decision of the Assembly (A) was very wrong and so should not be followed, unless and until facts can be provided to bring more light!

Is this not what the Holy Spirit did in the case with Paul? Paul made a judgment in regard to certain things that were being done in Corinth, as it was related to him by those from the house of Chloe (I Cor. 1:11; also cf. I Cor. 11:17-18), and yet Paul was not there! And, if we might use our brother Darby's words, Paul was not there "to know what passed," or to be "fully informed of what took place." Yet the Holy Spirit knew what passed and so was able to guide Paul in making a judgment in regard to that issue even though he never actually was there at the time in question.

But what is missing even more (since the scenarios mentioned above are subjective judgments), is there is no appeal to the objective Word of God! As Assemblies, we are commanded to follow the Word; we walk by a higher authority than the judgment of any one Assembly, the authority of the eternal Word of God, which has encapsulated the commandments of the apostles and prophets, of which, we are told to be mindful.

II Peter 3:1-2 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: ² **That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.** KJV

It was the apostles and prophets, not subsequent Christians and/or Churches, who were given the commandments, including the means and methods, regarding how judgments were to be made throughout this dispensation. They were called by God to lay the foundation of the Church for this dispensation, and they were the ones that were called the foundation stones of the Church, not subsequent Christians.

I Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. KJV

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*. KJV

Revelation 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them *were* the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. NASB

Because of this, i.e. the overriding authority of the Word of God, any judgment that is made by an Assembly that contradicts the eternal Word of God must be viewed as null and void, and upon that fact alone, even if no other facts are known, such a judgment can be ignored by another Assembly. Beloved we do not believe in the principle of one “magisterium” of an individual Church subverting the liberty of other Churches, wherein the pronouncements or teaching of one Assembly becomes binding upon all.

Nor do we believe in a mindset that approaches the mindset of the Roman Catholic Church, which mindset believed that every decree *from the chair* of Rome must be adhered to and accepted by all within the Church, that is if they wish to remain in communion with Rome. Yet, that mindset is not far beyond the mindset of our brother Darby, who stated in the letter above, “You receive a person because he is in communion in [London], that is, you own the body as a competent witness of Christ’s mind, without saying it is infallible. You own the body, its acts; you wish to be in communion with it; **you must then recognize its other acts.**” In other words, he is saying if you wish to remain in communion with London, you must accept its acts, i.e. its judgments, its decisions!

That this was their mindset was borne out by another brother from that time period, who remonstrated with them, saying,

“You have erected high walls which separate you from your brethren in Christ. You exclude some of the holiest and brightest of God’s saints. You protest against systems, and boast of not being a sect, and yet you have systematized yourselves into one of the narrowest of sects. To be a member of your body, it is not enough to be a child of God, walking in communion with Him, and in the full confession of the truth. You practically say the credentials of Heaven and of the Word of God are not enough. The rights of private judgment must be given up. There must be an agreement to cut off (without a hearing) all that you cut off, and to worship only with those with whom you consent to worship. You

impose it on those in your communion to “judge the question”—that is, to pronounce the sentence of condemnation on the brethren at Bethesda. You thus establish a new term of communion, and virtually add to the Word of God.”⁷⁴

“To state it, then, in brief, the “Exclusive” doctrine is this— that in order to the maintenance of her purity and holiness *the Church is responsible to excommunicate all those who, though sound in the faith, and in other respects consistent in conduct, are deficient in the exercise of discipline in such a case as that which has been before us; and further, to excommunicate all Churches who refuse to excommunicate them, and all Churches which knowingly receive communicants from these again, and so on ad infinitum.*”⁷⁵

And it was also borne out by W. H. Dorman who, at first, was an ardent supporter of our brother Darby, who sided with his theory of communion for over eighteen years, but who finally, saw the error and the futility of it all. He said this in an extract in the periodical *Precious Truths*, from his book *The Close of Twenty-eight Years of Association with J.N.D.*

“I cannot any longer pursue to 'the tenth generation' people who have no more to do with Mr. Newton's doctrine than I have, nor any more leaning towards it—merely because they cannot endorse Mr. Darby's decree, issued 18 years ago, as to the way in which the evil must be dealt with if they would maintain themselves in his association. My heart has been withered by the necessity of schooling Christians—young and old, ignorant and well-informed—in the mysteries of an act of discipline of eighteen years' standing, and in endeavouring to show the present bearings of 'the Bethesda question' and 'the neutral party'—hateful phrases as they have become At first, of course, all this was pursued as necessary to the maintenance of purity of doctrine and of 'a true Christ' amongst those who took part with Mr. D. in his position, and principles, and acts; and I honestly thought it so myself. But this guise is now utterly and rudely stripped away.”⁷⁶

Our brother Darby claimed compete infallibility of judgment for London in his letter. Yes, he does say he will allow other Assemblies to remonstrate (i.e. dispute), **but only as long as they do not disown London's judgment!** In other words, if they want to claim they are in communion with London, they must submit to the judgment of London, so in reality his claim of *primâ facie* is not true, for in his mind the issue is closed, not really open for discussion or rebuttal or, as he says,

⁷⁴ G., *The Exclusive Brethren: Their Origin and Discipline*. (William Macintosh, London, 1867) pg. 47

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 22

⁷⁶ *Precious Truth*, No. 22, January 1, 1867 (Arthur Hall, London, 1865) pg. 167

remonstrances. In other words he says he is not open to any evidence that might contradict their judgment as seen below.

“I recognise the full liberty in you, as having also the Spirit as a part of Christ’s body, led to act by it, in remonstrating or enlightening, **but not to disown it on your own authority**, and then to pretend to own it still, and speak of being in communion with it.”

However this is not consistent with his claim of *primâ facie*. One must remember that our brother Darby was at first a trained lawyer, having been admitted to the Irish Bar in the mid 1820’s, after having completed his studies at Trinity College in Dublin. As such, it seems he would know that by definition (at least as it appears in certain law books) anything that was *primâ facie* could always be challenged and refuted by other evidence. Take for example, how this understanding of *primâ facie* was applied in English law to certain records, deeds, contracts, or wills. In *Codex Legum Anglicanarum*, published in the early part of the 19th century, it states the following: “An instrument not under seal is, in some cases...only *primâ facie* evidence, **and may be contradicted and explained.**”⁷⁷

And so, at least, according to the definitions and understanding contained in law books and cases, our brother was not being consistent or fair with his claim to *primâ facie*, by not giving equal weight for other evidence to nullify and contradict his own understanding. By his own claim of *primâ facie* he should have been open to other evidence which contradicted his own views, but since he was not, it actually justified the other brethren’s actions, for they were providing evidence in line with his claim of *primâ facie*.

He simply would not admit any other evidence as being legitimate evidence. But it was legitimate, for the Word of God was the evidence that the other brethren provided to contradict his *primâ facie* judgment!

The Word of God was the reason for invalidating the judgment of London. But the brethren in London were drifting more and more away from absolute authority of Scripture and more and more to a spirit of infallibility for themselves. Indeed, as we will discuss shortly, they once made the startling statement, when asked about one of their judgments, regarding a certain perceived offence—they said that the offence was “of

⁷⁷ George Blaxland, *Codex Legum Anglicanarum; or, a Digest of Principles of English Law* (Henry Butterworth, London, 1839) pg. 492

a character not needing to be determined by Scripture!”⁷⁸ (The exclamation point is mine!)

And what is so ironic in all of this (especially since our brother Darby did not believe in the biblical doctrine of Church autonomy, which he called Church independence), is that he criticized other Assemblies for disowning London’s judgment based upon their own authority (i.e. their independent or autonomous action), while the Assembly in London was able to disown the judgment of other Assemblies on their own authority! In one letter regarding this issue of Church autonomy, he once said the following—

“It is anxiously insisted on, in a tract...that no assembly can be defiled by receiving evil, but only the individuals who accept it. But your letters, as does that tract, make independent churches, each acting for itself. If this be the case, the unity which constituted the whole being of the brethren is wholly given up; that for which I left the Establishment is wholly gone. All this I reject wholly and absolutely.”⁷⁹

Now I would, indeed, agree in part with our brother Darby in this one point—an assembly can be defiled by receiving evil, but Scripture delineates which forms of evil can defile an entire assembly. It restricts it to those evils that require excommunication and not to evil in general, for Scripture says every believer sins and so has some evil in his life (until the sin is confessed, forgiven, and washed away by His blood), which, if Scripture did not restrict it to certain excommunicable evils, would then mean an Assembly would become defiled every time a new believer was received into the Assembly! Of course, that is not true.

The problem is that some evils, such as spiritual pride, or other subtle evils of the soul like jealousy, envy, a quick temper, etc., are not overcome in some believer’s life immediately. Sanctification is a process and during that process every Christian will have some form of evil present in their life, which sometimes the Christian does not even realize until the Holy Spirit shines His light in their hearts. Nevertheless, because the believer is not yet perfect, evil is present in them and so in the Assembly (that is until they are glorified and fully conformed to the

⁷⁸ Henry Groves, *Darbyism: Its Rise, Progress, and Development*, 3rd edition (James E. Hawkins, London, c.1880) pg. 61-62

⁷⁹ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D.*, Vol. II, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 257

image of Christ). But all this will be discussed in the next section of Church Discipline.

The real issue before us is our discussion of *primâ facie* and the behavior of our brother Darby. The issue is that he rejects “wholly and absolutely” any idea of Church independence or autonomy, believing all Churches should walk together in unity, which in his mind means no Assemblies are independent of the others. And that is the problem which I said is so ironic—he allows for himself, what he disallows for others. By allowing remonstrances, but not a different outcome of judgment by another Assembly, he is the one acting independently! He disallows independent judgments of other Assemblies, but allows it for himself and the one Assembly in London! So, is that not an evil in itself? Would that not constitute a sin of hypocrisy and self-righteousness, buoyed by the evil of spiritual pride, wherein one is wise in one’s own estimation (Rom 12:16)?

So, if that was the case, would not an Assembly then have been defiled by receiving our brother Darby into their Assembly? According to his own standards of righteousness, one would have to say, “Yes,” but by the standards of the Word of God, one would have to say, “No,” because the evil of hypocrisy, in and of itself, is not an excommunicable offence.

Moreover, the fact of the matter is that Scripture does teach Church autonomy, which, if our brother Darby had simply acknowledged (since he practiced it himself anyway), he could have given the other Assemblies liberty to disagree with him and the one Assembly in London, and so he would not have condemned the other Assemblies and excommunicated them as being defiled with evil. But, as we already discussed, that was not possible for him to do, for if he did it would unravel his whole theory of separation from evil as being the basis of the unity of the Spirit. Thus, he measured other believers and other Assemblies, by his own conscience, by his own judgment of what is evil, along with the concurring judgment of the one Assembly in London, which meant all Assemblies had to agree and submit to him and to those brethren in London, otherwise, they would be considered evil and so excommunicated!

Beloved, in this our brother simply lost his way. It seems spiritual pride blinded him to his own true condition. His broad theory of separation from evil caused him to separate from the good in other brethren, which ended up isolating him so much from the Body of Christ that the spiritual

warmth of his love for other brethren seemed to grow cold, which caused him and those brethren with him in London to restrict their love, in reality, to only those who would agree with their own views and judgments. In reality they became puffed up with spiritual pride and a sense of spiritual infallibility.

And in this, their mindset was not much different, in many ways, from the assertions and mindset of Rome which is revealed below in a quote from *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*? The Church in Rome's mindset led to a motto, which they attribute to Augustine, which states—*Roma locuta, causa finita est* (Rome has spoken, the matter is settled)!

To sum up the conditions necessary on the part of the Pope, in order that his decisions may be *ex cathedra*, and therefore infallible, he must act, not as a private individual, but as the *authentic teacher* of all the faithful. He must not only act as an authentic teacher, but he must also intend to impose an *obligation of assent* on the faithful; and, moreover, this obligation must proceed from the *fulness of his apostolic authority*, **and therefore be final and unconditional**, *Roma locuta, causa finita est.*" ⁸⁰

Now I know our brother Darby did not approach the level of evil or error in the Roman Catholic Church, but in this one narrow aspect he did. In many ways his attitude was no different. In essence, he is saying—*Londinium locuta, causa finita est* (London has spoken, the matter is settled).

Their sense of infallibility of Spirit, despite appeals to the Word of God, which contradicted their judgments, revealed how far they had fallen. This mindset is also borne witness to by W. H. Dorman in a letter to J. L. Harris.

"That which obtains amongst them in this character is at best the expressed judgment of one or other of their leaders, which is carried out by others in the spirit of blind subjection, without so much as an appeal to Scripture as the ground of authority, though their action is professed to be the rule of the Spirit." ⁸¹

This was the problem, as it was with the Roman Catholic Church—London had forgotten the primacy of the Word of God in their lives.

⁸⁰ *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*, Volume 18 (Hardy and Mahony, Philadelphia, 1893) pg. 679

⁸¹ W.H. Dorman, *High Church Claims of 'The Exclusive Brethren', A Series of Letters to Mr. J.L. Harris - Letter 6* (Morgan & Chase, London, 1869) pg. 22-23

They insisted on the binding force of their judgments, but forgot the binding force of Scripture. In that light, they would not admit an Assembly's right to question any of their judgments.

That attitude is, of course, the complete opposite of Scripture's command for a local Assembly to question and examine all things. We must not forget that I Thess. 5:21 is a command given to a local Assembly (and so to every local Assembly), which provides for us all an important spiritual principle that nothing should be accepted in a "spirit of blind subjection," as witnessed by brother Dorman above—

I Thessalonians 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. KJV

Additionally, London also asserted their judgment was the judgment of the Spirit, yet they ignored the command of the Spirit in Scripture for brethren to test the spirits.

I John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. NKJV

And, finally, as briefly mentioned before, our brother Darby insistence that the consciences of other brethren were to be "bound," *primâ facie*, by the consciences of those brethren in London was also a complete denial of the authority and commands of Scripture, and so was additional evidence of their disobedient spirits.

As we quoted before, when our brother Darby was asked, "Are our consciences to be bound by the action of the brethren in [London], he answered with this statement—"I answer, *primâ facie*, certainly, or there can be and is no common action." And yet, it was the apostle Paul who declared in I Cor. 10:29b—"Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?"

Let me ask the question, "Who should we obey, Paul the apostle, or our brother Darby?" "Which admonitions should brethren follow, the admonitions of Scripture, or the admonitions of the one Assembly of God in London?"

And so, dear brethren, we see again the commands of Scripture were ignored and rationalized away to justify a new way of thinking that contradicted the original principles that were shown to them through Scripture by the Holy Spirit in the late 1820's and early 1830's..

In fact, one of the *remonstrances*, if you will, that was brought to bear upon this change of thinking by our brother Darby, was that by Anthony Norris Groves. He once wrote the following to our brother regarding his departure from the original principles first practice by the brethren:

Did we not feel constrained to follow the apostolic rule of *not judging other men's consciences*, as to liberty...These were the *then* principles of our separation and intercommunion; we had resolved never to try to *get men to act in UNIFORMITY further than they FELT in UNIFORMITY*; neither by frowns, or smiles; and this for one simple reason, that we saw no authority given us from God thus to act; nor did our experience lead us to feel it the best means at all of promoting their blessing or our common aim of a *perfect spiritual uniformity of judgment*.”⁸²

And in another place, whenever disagreement might reign between brethren and/or Assemblies, he wrote the following in order to preserve peace:

“In Theory nothing can be more simple and apparently true, then, that if you are all 'baptized into one body,' by one Spirit, you ought to speak the same thing, and be of the same judgment; but in fact, nothing is more certain than that, notwithstanding the unity of the body and the unity of the baptism, this is not, and never has been the case: we must therefore, **in a multitude of cases, leave every man to be 'fully persuaded in his own mind.'** In smaller matters, this will be easy; in graver, it will be better to form small separate households of faith in love, each preserving their conscience inviolate, than that either party should coerce others into their views and opinions. Uprightness of conscience is essential to all spiritual prosperity, but coercion into some judgment is not. **Infinitely better is it for each household of faith to seek to walk in all things well-pleasing to the Lord, than to undertake the management and direction of other households.**”⁸³

The fact is that our brother Darby and those who followed him lost their perspective and respect for the primacy of God's Word in their actions, so much so, that when another Assembly once tried to gather evidence in light of Scripture, they demurred, in essence saying that it was enough

⁸² B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 25-26

⁸³ Mrs. Harriet Groves (Baynes), *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves: compiled chiefly from his journals and letters; to which is added a supplement, containing recollections of Miss Paget, and accounts of missionary work in India, etc.*, 3rd Edition (James Nisbet, London 1869) Pg. 441-442

that they had judged the case, so they did not need the judgment of Scripture!

“The Walworth gathering asked of the Priory meeting, “What sin or sins, according to Scripture, of an excommunicable character,” he had committed. “Three letters,” say the Sheffield brethren, “were afterwards received from the Priory brethren in answer to the above, assuming throughout that the offence in April, 1860, described as “grievous against the Lord’s presence and His people,” **was “of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture.”**”⁸⁴

Again, unfortunately, we must ask how is this mindset any different than the mindset of the Roman Catholic Church, which believed that their authority equaled that of Scripture, which we already referenced above as the Magisterium of the Church, wherein Tradition of the Church is combined with Sacred Scripture, and so becomes just as authoritative, as can be seen in this excerpt from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

“Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.” ‘And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching.’ As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘**does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone.** Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.’”⁸⁵

Beloved, such an attitude alone is enough for an Assembly to set aside any decision our brother Darby and London made, and so re-examine the evidence and come to a judgment of their own in the light of Scripture. The attitude of those brethren in London should remind us of those in Israel, who, during the Old Testament, once acted the same way independently of Scripture.

Isaiah 8:16, 20 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony: **if they speak not according to this word, it is because *there is no light in them.*** KJV

⁸⁴ Henry Groves, *Darbyism: Its Rise, Progress, and Development*, 3rd edition (James E. Hawkins, London, c.1880) pg. 61-62

⁸⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Imprima Potest, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, (Doubleday, New York, 1995) pg. 31

Now, let me pause here and address a point to my brethren who, despite all that has been said, would still agree with the viewpoint of our brother Darby. More than likely, because of that agreement, they would take umbrage with my using a comparison of their mindset with that of the Roman Catholic Church. Let me explain why I do so (although I am not the first to do so). The reason is because of the consistency of truth! Truth will always be consistent. As such, consistency helps us test our conclusions and interpretations. This principle is revealed by our Lord in many places in the New Testament, but let provide one example.

Matthew 6:30 “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith? NKJV

Our Lord is making a truthful statement upon which all will agree—God clothes the grass of the field. Because that is true and is accepted by those with whom He is talking, he then states this must also be true—will He not much more clothe you!

The New Testament is replete with examples like this for this was a common Old Testament hermeneutic recognised by many. It was known by some as the principle of “light to heavy,” which was taken to mean, if this is true (the light), how much more must this be true (the heavy). Or I have heard some explain it as “minor to major”—if this is true (the minor), how much more must this be true (the major).

This is a legitimate hermeneutic of Scripture revealed to us by our Lord so as to establish “truth.” Why?—Because God created things in this universe to reveal certain things about His character and attributes, one of those characteristics being Truth. As such, he created the grass of the field to bespeak His providential care. In so doing, our Lord used it to teach the consistency of truth, which in turn becomes a safeguard against error.

Let’s use another example from general revelation that might also demonstrate that truth must always be consistent. From a very basic creational perspective in God’s creation, this consistency of truth is also demonstrated by the mathematics that God created and so established for His creation. Thus, if $2 \times 3 = 6$, then 3×2 must also equal 6, and conversely $6 \div 2$ must equal 3. Why? The answer is because truth is consistent. Thus, if one agrees that $2 \times 3 = 6$, but then wants to believe

that $6 \div 2 = 4$, one can conclude that such a one is in error, for truth must always be consistent.

This is the wonder of Roman 1:20 in which we see that God said He created all things to correspond in some way to His eternal power, invisible attributes and Divine Nature. And one of the attributes of God is Truth. Thus, Romans 1:20 tells us that even in such an innocuous thing as mathematics, when it is compared to something as great as theology, our God, according to Rom. 1:20, still made it to bespeak something of Himself in that it was created to always teach all mankind in a limited manner that Truth must always be consistent! How wonderful is our Creator and the “general revelation” He provided. Truly, man is without excuse in their denial of Him, for He has revealed Himself in so many ways!

Thus, back to our example from Matt. 6:30, if we all agree that God is the Creator of all things, who controls everything in His creation, then if He clothes the grass of the field, He will most certainly clothe us who are more important to Him than the grass of the field. Because the first is accepted as true, then the second point must be accepted as true **for God created truth to always be consistent!**

So when it comes to spiritual things, this is a biblical safeguard to protect us from being led into error, and this is a reason Scripture is so important for the spiritual well-being of the Christian, because Scripture is true and always consistent! If we find one principle that is true in Scripture, then that same principle will still be true in other applications or situations of the same kind.

Thus, back to our example of the Roman Catholic Church. Most brethren will all agree that Rome was wrong in controlling other Churches by asserting their preeminence over Churches in other localities. And most will agree that they were wrong by their assertion that their judgments were binding upon all. Thus, if one wishes to claim today that they are walking in truth, as Scripture enjoins us in II John 1:4, then they must agree that **if it is wrong for Rome** to behave that way, **it is then wrong for London** to behave that way (having a somewhat similar mindset). Every believer is commanded to walk in truth, as commanded by God our Father.

II John 1:4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. KJV

Thus, if we all claim to walk in truth, we must all be consistent in our attitudes and conclusions. If you agree the mindset of Rome is wrong, then whenever you might be shown that same mindset is being manifested in London, or in New York, or in Bristol or Plymouth, or in any other Church or locality, we must be consistent and not excuse or condone such a mindset. If we do not, then we are not being consistent and our statements or interpretations are not true and we are not “walking in truth.” As we said with the creational example of simple math, 2×3 will always equal 6, which means that $6 \div 2$ will always equal 3.

And so, for example, let us apply this spiritual principle of truth. What if someone were to say the following to us—“Yes, 2×3 does equal 6, but please do not tell me that $6 \div 2$ must equal 3, for I do not believe it does. You may conclude that it does, but that is because you are mixing apples and oranges. The two equations are not equal. Please do not tell me that because the $2 \times 3 = 6$, then $6 \div 2 = 3$. You are wrong!”

If anyone was to make such a statement to us, then we could conclude that that person is not being consistent with truth, but is deceived and in error.

So to conclude this little excursion; this is the reason I use the example of Rome. Most brethren will agree that Rome was wrong in her attitudes regarding submission of other Churches to her pronouncements simply because they claimed they had the judgment of the Spirit. And because of that, those same brethren should agree any such claim will always be wrong, no matter what other Church makes it, which, by way of our example must include what our brother Darby and the brethren in London did, especially when they said that their judgments of the Spirit were “of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture!” If they do not admit that, then they are not being consistent, which means their conclusions must be false, and so should be rejected as being binding. Why?—because truth is always consistent.

Beloved, our brother Darby and those with him in London had simply lost their way once they replaced the true unity of the Spirit with their theory of separation from evil. It led them into all kinds of error. In their false zeal they raised themselves up as arbitrators of truth, creating their own “man-made traditions,” if you will, regarding the necessary requirements for purity, unity and communion between Assemblies, wherein their traditions began to hold greater sway than Scripture. This is plainly shown in that they came to a point that they could declare that

a judgment was “of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture.” Beloved, the sad fact is their own words betray a false zeal, a spiritual pride and a self-righteousness that approached that of the Pharisees. Remember the Lord’s words those Pharisees.

Mark 7:6-9 And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.’⁷ ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’⁸ ‘Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.’⁹ He was also saying to them, “You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. NASB

It seems the problem of our brother Darby was that with issues like this he never allowed the Lord Jesus to be the One to judge, at the time of His own choosing and wisdom, between Assemblies that might disagree. He never allowed the Lord to act as the Chief Shepherd. Yes, indeed, the Spirit will not judge one way in London and another way in Sheffield, just as he said, but our brother never would allow the Lord Jesus to be the One to correct the Assembly that must have interpreted the Spirit’s judgment in the wrong way. Rather, he simply took it upon himself to judge the question and so just excommunicated all who would not agree and submit.

Why could not our brother Darby (since he truly believed that he was right) continue to believe that Sheffield was wrong, and London was right but then allow the Lord to judge between the two? Why could he not allow Sheffield the “liberty” to disagree with the judgment of London?

It seems the answer is because he falsely believed that the Body of Christ will always walk in tandem, with the same judgments, in this dispensation of the Church. However, this again ignores the Word of God, and in essence, really created a *London Magisterium*, if you will, which, in turn, ended up elevating his theories to a level equal to that of Scripture, so that his interpretations become the only interpretation that *must* be adhered to by all Assemblies (thus the creation and elevation of a man-made tradition). He demands respect for his interpretations, but then shows no respect for the interpretations of other believers.

(Perhaps, part of the reason for this mindset by our brother Darby may have been his misunderstanding of Matt. 18:15-20. Perhaps, because he viewed it as a Gentile Christian, he failed to understand the Jewish background of our Lord’s admonition. As such, he had a mistaken view

regarding Heaven's relationship with binding and loosing done on earth, which we will examine in the chapter on Church Discipline.)

But let us continue—if his viewpoint that all Assemblies across the earth must walk in tandem was correct, we must ask ourselves as to why Paul, in the New Testament, tells the Corinthian Church that they are to judge for themselves in I Cor. 11:13, in regard to a disagreement about women praying with their heads uncovered. The rest of the Churches knew of no such custom as Corinth was practicing (I Cor. 11:16), and yet Paul did not excommunicate Corinth because of that disagreement, thinking that every Assembly must always walk in complete agreement! And yet our brother Darby, and those who were with him, excommunicated Sheffield for a disagreement so much less important than the issue between Corinth and the other Assemblies! And the issue is not regarding whether Corinth was right or wrong in their judgment regarding women praying with their head uncovered. In fact, it becomes all the more significant for the issue before us because they obviously were wrong on that issue and the other Assemblies were right. And yet, Paul still gave them the liberty of judgment to disagree without any intimation of excommunication (obviously, because he understood the Chief Shepherd would judge the issue as the Chief Shepherd).

In fact, what may some brethren may not realize, is that the liberty given to Church in Corinth to judge for themselves on the issue before them was actually a command of the Holy Spirit given to Paul, since Paul wrote under inspiration of the Spirit! (So, in this, our brother Darby was opposing the Holy Spirit's wisdom regarding how to handle disagreements between Assemblies not having to do with sins requiring excommunication, as was the case in regard to Sheffield.) Our brother Darby demanded respect for "their" own judgment of the Spirit, yet he ignored "the" judgment of the Spirit given by Paul to the Assembly in Corinth!

I Corinthians 11:13-16 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with head* uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. NASB

The Greek verb for "judge" above is the Greek verb κρίνατε in the imperative mood, which is the mood of command. Literally the clause could be translated as, "Among you-all—yourselves—you judge." Or it

could be translated, as it is translated in Young's Literal Translation as "In your own selves judge ye." The point is that Paul commands them to "judge for themselves" as to whether it is proper for a woman to pray to God with their head uncovered. And he does this knowing for sure it was not a proper or right thing to do so! And, yet, despite that, he still tells them to judge for themselves. Why?—because Paul does not "lord" it over their faith; moreover, he respected their autonomy and liberty as an Assembly under the headship of Christ.

II Corinthians 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

As we said in the first volume of this book: "In Matt. 20:25 our Lord told his apostles the following—

Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles **lord** it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them." NASB

He warns them not to seek to "lord" it over others. This same Greek word is also used in Ps. 110:2 (109:2) in the Greek LXX translated as "rule" below.

The Lord shall send out a rod of power for thee out of Sion: **rule** thou in the midst of thine enemies." Psalm 110:2 (109:2) Brenton's Version

The last clause could just as well be translated from the Greek as follows—

The Lord shall send out a rod of power for thee out of Sion: **lord** thou in the midst of thine enemies." Psalm 110:2 (109:2)

What this shows us is that such an exercise of authority, i.e. lording it over others, can only be done by the Lord Jesus Christ. He will "lord" it over all the earth as it should be done, in righteousness, grace and purity. Indeed, it says he will "lord" it over all his enemies, which we know from Rev. 11:15 includes the whole world. He will do so for He alone is Lord of lords and King of kings. The Lord Jesus is the only one in Scripture who can "lord" it over all the saints, the only one which can "rule" over more than one locality of the Lord's people, the only one who can "lord" it over every Assembly.

He is the only one in Scripture ever allowed to exercise such authority.

The Lord Jesus has no “vicar” on the earth in the person of a bishop, an elder, nor, indeed, in the person of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, or pastor or teacher. Scripture never allows such a thing to man. And, as we have just said, even the apostle Paul did not presume to take such authority upon himself and “lord” it over the Churches (II Cor. 1:24). Nor did Peter, ever take such authority upon himself, rather, he exercised his spiritual authority by example, just as he exhorted the elders to do so in his epistle (I Pet. 5:3).

And so we see that Paul gave them liberty to judge the issue themselves, even though Paul well knew they would be wrong if they ignored his admonition. He even made known to them (anticipating that there judgment might be different than his judgment) that a differing judgment will also be at odds with all the other Churches or Assemblies! And yet, we see that Paul did not threaten them with excommunication if they persisted in such a judgment regarding their improper practice of prayer, in which men prayed with their heads covered in the Assembly (presumably by the influence of Jewish tradition), and the women prayed with their head uncovered in the Assembly (presumably from the influence of Gentile culture). Rather he granted them the liberty to disagree, knowing that the Chief Shepherd would step in, in accordance with his timing and wisdom to apply discipline where needed. (Remember what our Lord did in reference to Ephesus. His discipline ultimately resulted in their lampstand being removed from the earth. Beloved, the Lord is more than capable of judging and disciplining local Churches.)

And so we see that the Holy Spirit’s judgment of what was to be done when disagreements arose between Churches, on an issue like that in Corinth, was not to have a forced unanimity gained through threatened excommunications of one Church by another, but rather to have and acknowledgment of each Assembly’s liberty in Christ, knowing that the Lord Jesus in this dispensation of the Church will always correct what needs to be corrected through the sanctification process and, if need be, the chastening love of a Shepherd, as the Holy Spirit revealed to us in Rev. 2 & 3. (Now, during the Millennium, of course, there will be uniformity of judgment, and a full expression of the Church’s oneness, for the Lord will be over all the earth and the whole Church will be gathered in one place around His throne. If there ever would be a time, when all Assemblies could walk together in tandem and with the same judgment, that time would be the time.)

So since the Holy Spirit commands each Assembly to stand fast in the liberty of Christ (especially when that liberty is threatened by extra-local attempts of hegemony) how should disagreements between Assemblies be handled? Perhaps, it would be helpful if we try to practically apply these spiritual truths to an actual situation that happened even before that of London and Sheffield, back to that dispute between our brother and those with him with Bethesda, especially since we have now seen that “separation from evil” is not God’s principle of unity for the Church and that liberty of judgment must be granted to every Assembly, and that Scripture does not demand every Assembly on earth to walk on earth in complete uniformity of judgments.

In that light how should that disagreement have been handled according to these principles of fellowship and liberty? In other words, how would Paul’s command for every Assembly to stand fast in the liberty of Christ been put into practice when that controversy arose all those years ago? Below are some thoughts regarding some things they could have done, and some things according to Scripture they should “not” have done, and then concluding with some suggestions as to what things they should have done in light of Scripture.

What they could do—

1) Our brother Darby, and the brothers with him, could have judged Bethesda’s decision as wrong (in their opinion and estimation of Scripture). They had the complete liberty in Christ Jesus to do so (cf. Acts 20:28).

2) As a local Assembly (i.e. the Assembly formed after Darby left Ebrington Street) they could have refused to receive anyone from Bethesda, no matter what the reason, if they felt the Lord was leading them to do so to protect the flock (cf. Acts 20:28-30 with II John 1:9-10). If they were wrong in their refusal, the Lord Jesus as the Chief Shepherd would take care of it, disciplining them if necessary (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:19).

3) They could have refused to break bread with the Bethesda Assembly, if and when they ever travelled to Bristol. That is their liberty in Christ, wherein each Christian is guided by their own conscience (cf. Rom. 14:23; I Cor. 5:8; 11:27-28 KJV).

What they could “not” do—

1) Excommunicate the entire Assembly of Bethesda for not agreeing. That is not a biblical option; it is not based upon any Scripture, but is a man-made tradition formed by their own wisdom and understanding.

2) Cause division within Bethesda (behind the backs of the elders) through the use of private Bible Studies, or by any backbiting, railing, teaching, etc. Such is a work of the flesh and is never justified. All things should be done in the light (cf. Rom.16:17-18; II Cor. 12:20; Ps. 15:2-3; Prov. 26:20-26; I John 1:7; Eph. 5:8).

3) Threaten or excommunicate other Assemblies that disagreed with their viewpoint about Bethesda. It is wrong to “lord” it over the faith of others (II Cor. 1:24; I Pet. 5:3). They should have trusted the Chief Shepherd walking in the midst of His Assemblies to shepherd and discipline His flock (I Pe.2:25; Rev. 2:16).

What they should have done—

1.) Make their viewpoint known without apology, but then commit Bethesda to the hands of the Chief-Shepherd asking Him to do the necessary discipline (Gal. 4:16; Eph. 4:15; Acts 14:23; 20:32).

2) Respect the elders of the Assembly, as elders of that Assembly, even though they disagreed with them, and ask the Lord to take care of the situation since he was the Chief Shepherd of those under shepherds and Assembly (cf. I Thess. 5:12-13; I Tim 5:17).

3) Continue on with their own responsibilities as a local Assembly of the Lord, being careful to mind their own business (I Thess. 4:11 NKJV; I Pet. 4:15KJV).

According to Scripture this was their options. Conversely, Bethesda should also have respected them as a local Assembly, even though, they obviously disagreed with them. In that light, Bethesda could have also done the following.

What they could do—

1) Our brother Muller, Craik, and the other elders with them, could have judged the decision of our brother Darby and those who followed him as wrong (in their opinion and estimation of Scripture). They had the complete liberty in Christ Jesus to do so (cf. Acts 20:28).

2) As a local Assembly they could have received anyone from Plymouth, if they judged them sound in the faith (Rom. 15:7; Acts 9:26-28). If they were wrong in that reception, the Lord would take care of it by showing them their mistake, and/or disciplining them if necessary, always protecting His flock (John 10:14-16; Rev. 2:20-23).

3) Moreover, if they wished, they could have received one from the Assembly at Raleigh Street, even though they obviously disagreed with their reason for leaving the Assembly at Ebrington Street in Plymouth. They could receive such a one as long as they were not divisive. However, if that one began to cause problems, they could admonish, and/or discipline such a one according to Scripture (Rom. 15:7; Rom.16:17-18; I Thess. 5:12-13; Acts 20:28-30).

What they could “not” do—

1) Excommunicate the entire Assembly of Raleigh Street for seeing things differently than they did, as that would be but a man-made tradition formed by their own wisdom and understanding. That is not a biblical option.

2) Cause division within Raleigh Street (behind the backs of the leading brothers) through the use of private Bible Studies, or by any backbiting, railing, teaching, etc. Such is a work of the flesh is never justified. All things should be done in the light (cf. Rom.16:17-18; II Cor. 12:20; Ps. 15:2-3; Prov. 26:20-26; I John 1:7; Eph. 5:8).

3) Threaten or excommunicate other Assemblies that disagreed with their viewpoint about Darby and Raleigh Street. It is wrong to “lord” it over the faith of others (II Cor. 1:24; I Pet. 5:3). They should have trusted the Chief Shepherd walking in the midst of His Assemblies to shepherd and discipline His flock (I Pe.2:25; Rev. 2:16).

What they should have done—

1) Make their viewpoint known without apology, but then leave Raleigh Street in the hands of the Chief-Shepherd asking Him to do the necessary discipline if necessary (Gal. 4:16; Eph. 4:15; Acts 14:23; 20:32).

2) Respect the leading brothers of the Assembly, as leading brothers of that Assembly (Darby abandoned his earlier view regarding elders,

believing they no longer could be established in Churches), even though they disagreed with them, and ask the Lord to take care of the situation since he was the Chief Shepherd of those who took the lead (cf. I Thess. 5:12-13; I Tim 5:17).

3) Continue on with their own responsibilities as a local Assembly of the Lord, being careful to mind their own business (I Thess. 4:11 NKJV; I Pet. 4:15KJV).

Why could not our brother Darby do this and respect the liberty of Christ being exercised by other Assemblies? Why did he want every Assembly to respect and submit to the judgment of the Spirit that he believed resided with London's viewpoint, ignoring the judgment of the Spirit in other Assemblies? His claim of having the true judgment of the Spirit was only his opinion; he did not possess infallibility. And what is so ironic in all of this, for one who insisted that every Assembly must obey the judgment of the Spirit, is that he, himself, was the one who ignored the one judgment of the Spirit that we do know is true and infallible, that one that is found in the Word of God, i.e. the freedom of one Assembly to disagree with another Assembly in regard to issues like those mentioned in I Cor. 11: 13. And the matter of deciding to where to meet is certainly an issue like that in I Cor. 11:13. Indeed, some would say it was an issue even less than that of I Cor. 11:13! Yet that one true judgment and commandment of the Spirit in Scripture, he simply ignores!

In conclusion, in order to practically demonstrate what I mean, let's use our brother Darby's own words, as quoted above, and substitute "Corinth" for "Sheffield." Let's transport the Church of Corinth from the first century to the nineteenth century and let that be the disagreement that our brother Darby was confronting. After all, if our brother Darby would judge the situation with Sheffield the way he did, he most certainly would have made the same judgment against Corinth for their problem was much greater than simply a decision to receive a believer who was from an Assembly that was excommunicated over an issue involving where to meet!.

So if we transported the Church in Corinth to the nineteenth century in place of Sheffield, this is how part of his letter regarding the judgment of

the Spirit would have read—"How can I ... believe the Spirit judges one way at [Corinth], and another for [London]. It is confusion and disorder... You will say, **Are our consciences to be bound by the action of the brethren in [London]**? I answer, *primâ facie*, certainly, or there can be and is no **common action**."

In this imaginary example, it would still be London, who claimed to have the true judgment of the Spirit and Corinth, being like Sheffield, would be the Assembly that did not have the true judgment of the Spirit, according to Darby. But the fact that he believed such a disagreement was nothing but confusion and disorder did not justify his decision with others in London to excommunicate Sheffield (or in our example, Corinth). In fact, such a decision to excommunicate was clearly not *a judgment of the Spirit*, for the true judgment of the Holy Spirit for Corinth (and so for Sheffield) was to give them liberty to disagree with London on this issue, rather than blindly making them submit to London's judgment. So even if one wants to believe London's first judgment regarding Sheffield was the true judgment of the Spirit, their second judgment to excommunicate Sheffield for their supposed infraction was not the judgment of the Spirit!

Moreover, on the surface at least, in this imaginary example, our brother Darby would be saying that the consciences of the brethren in Corinth are to be bound by those in London. He states it emphatically, saying "certainly," for without such conformity he says they can have no common action!

And, yet beloved, listen to what the apostle Paul would say in this imaginary example, in light of what the Spirit commands regarding such issues like, where to meet, or the manner of prayer by men in the Assembly (and women), issues that do not conflict with the fundamentals of the Faith in Scripture. Let us use the same general question and format of our brother Darby's letter, but let's pretend as if they were writing to Paul and not to Darby, and so Paul was answering their questions. (Paul's answers in italics are his actual words in Scripture. The words in bold print are the words used from Darby's letter.)

You will say, "Are our consciences to be bound by the action of the brethren in [London]?" To answer your question, I say, "*In your own selves judge ye.*" "*But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.*" Moreover the Holy Spirit wants you to remember that "*if we judged ourselves rightly, we should*

*not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.” Also remember that, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” But know, beloved, if you disagree, this will not hinder our **common action**, so “when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. But I shall come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; and perhaps I shall stay with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I may go... In all of this know, “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The greeting is in my own hand-- Paul. If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen” (I Cor. 11:13, 16, 31-32; 14:37-38; 16: 3-6, 19-24).*

Beloved, when we compare these two imaginary letters with Corinth, who had the mind of the Spirit? Who had the proper faith in the Chief Shepherding of the Lord? Who had the love and patience for brethren who are being contentious, improper and ignorant? Who are we to imitate, the one who followed the Word of God, or the one who added to the Word of God by excommunicating entire Assemblies that would not acquiesce and agree with him? Who is the one who is right, and who even says so directly, claiming to be giving the commandments of the Lord, yet who is also the one who does not “lord” it over the saints, excommunicating them for not acknowledging his judgment in these things of the Spirit? The answer, of course, is the apostle Paul.

But, our brother Darby, in our imaginary example unfortunately (since he would act the same way for a greater error regarding the proper prayer of men and women, than simply the error of receiving someone from an Assembly that was put out for choosing their own meeting place apart from the fellowship with the other Assemblies in London), he would have ignored the judgment of the Spirit in regard to Corinth and, instead would have excommunicated them all out of the Church of God on earth, at least what represented it in London, saying that because of their lack of acquiescence to their judgment of the Spirit there could be “no common action,” for all Assemblies must acquiesce to “common actions!” Our brother simply took too much authority upon himself!

We most certainly know that the Holy Spirit will never act in a way that is wrong or sinful, so if the Holy Spirit allowed the autonomy of one Church (Corinth), which might result in there not being a unity of judgment or expression of oneness with other Churches on earth in an extra-local way, then, obviously, the Holy Spirit never required in Scripture that such extra-local agreements of judgment between Churches be enforced by one Church exercising control over others by excommunicating them if they do not agree and submit.

Obviously, the Holy Spirit desires unanimity, but the Holy Spirit does not allow such unanimity to be gained by unbiblical means. And He certainly does not insist (as our brother Darby did) that such expressions of oneness be enforced through wholesale excommunications of one Church by another, or by any one person, or group of persons, usurping the authority and power of Christ Jesus over His own Churches. He grants to Churches a liberty of judgment in fellowship. And this brings us to our next point about the limits of our fellowship in certain circumstances.

Limits of Expression in Fellowship

One of the reasons it seems our brother Darby was reluctant to grant the liberty of judgment to other Assemblies was because it felt the oneness our Lord prayed for in John 17 must be a visible oneness witnessed by the world, which he interpreted as requirement for every Assembly to walk together in tandem, or as he called “common action.” To him this was the only way the world could see a fulfilment of the Lord’s prayer for unity in John 17. He once said the following regarding this oneness or unity that our Lord prayed for.

“Christ asks that we may be one, so that the world may believe; John 17:21. **That which Christ asks for, is a visible unity**, a unity which witnesses to the nature, the love, and the holiness of Christ, and even to His power; and that, in order that the world which knows not Christ, neither can see Him, may learn, by

the effects **which it sees**, what is the real source of grace which is hidden from it and beyond its reach.⁸⁶

But is that what our Lord really prayed for in John 17? We will now examine whether Scripture ever expects Christians to come together and create a union of different Assemblies, made up by Assemblies from many different localities, all being bound by the judgments made by one Assembly, or made by a group of Assemblies, all so that they might fulfill what Darby termed—a “visible unity,” which the world could see. So with that question in mind, let’s continue.

One of the first things one notices in considering this question is that throughout Church History there has always been a problem when Christians seek a “formal,” “external,” and “structured” unity between a group of Churches upon earth that is greater than the unity required by the Holy Spirit in Scripture; This is especially true, when such unions are gained by forced submission and/or threatened excommunications, wherein many Churches are (in reality) brought under one man’s formal authority upon earth, other than the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever a man tries to usurp that rightful lordship of Christ, heartache and division eventually ensue. On the other hand, when the autonomy of each local Church under Christ is respected, and the authority of her appointed elders or leading brothers is honoured, a fellowship of the saints can be maintained within the proper limits of Scripture.

Why is this? In the first place, because the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ has only delegated His authority to local expressions of His body, i.e. the local Church. In Scripture, one does not see such a thing as oneness of the Body of Christ and the unity of the Spirit being manifested as a national Church, or various local Churches unifying to form a denominational body over a wide geographic area, or, indeed, as our brother Darby envisaged, a number of Churches who agree with one Church that they consider to be an overseeing Church, and/or one Church that expects that their decision must be adhered to by every other Church or they will be excommunicated. Any of these scenarios would create a

⁸⁶ J. N. Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Ecclesiastical No. 2, Volume 4* (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames, 1962) pg. 34-35

hierarchical structure not found in Scripture, which, in a very real sense, would create a clergy/laity system applied on an Assembly wide scale! No, in Scripture we see local expressions of the Church, not national expressions, not denominational expressions, and not enforced expressions of the Church gained from wholesale excommunications of other Assemblies.

When one attempts to assert one's ecclesiastical authority beyond the local Church, one ends up usurping our Lord's rightful authority to shepherd and oversee His own Church. The only authority that our Lord extends to an individual beyond the bounds of a local Church is a spiritual authority. The apostles exercised this type of authority, but they never presumed to solidify it into a formal and ecclesiastical authority over a number of Churches, wherein the unity of the Spirit was maintained by their changing their spiritual or moral authority into an enforced ecclesiastical authority that all must agree with or risk being censured or even excommunicated.

Whenever a Christian leader ignores this principle and attempts to oversee or control many Churches for the purposes of creating a so-called visible unity, the inevitable result will be division within the body of Christ, resulting in the creation of a denominational mindset. And even though such creations may refuse to use a denominational name, they are, nevertheless, still acting as a denomination, for they only receive those Churches into their circle of fellowship that will agree with their point of view and acquiesce to their supposed adherence to the truth. Such creations are divisive, for they will inevitably reject Churches never rejected by the Chief Shepherd. And so, whether such creations are small, or whether they are large, they can never *manifest* the true unity of the Spirit, for the unity of the Spirit is not based upon uniformity of judgment, but upon the Name of the Father, the Son's sanctification of Himself, wherein His blood was shed, and by the glory of His Life given to all who believe through the precious gift of the Holy Spirit.

As our brother Darby declared, God is, indeed, a God of order. On this our brother was correct, but he used that principle to enforce an order never found in Scripture. The order we should follow is the order already created for us in the pages of Scripture, and those pages never instruct one group of elders, let alone one man like our brother Darby, to oversee the elders and saints of another Assembly. It is not biblical, and, as such, is presumptuous and an evil in and of itself (using Darby's nomenclature for sinful).

Additionally, in those cases, where discipline is not exercised by the local elders, Scriptures indicates that it will be our Lord as the Chief Shepherd, the Senior Pastor (elder), if you will, who will exercise the needed discipline or chastisement. Only He can excommunicate an entire Assembly. That is His prerogative, not that of a mere man. Even Paul, an apostle of Christ, did not ever presume to excommunicate an entire Assembly.

This was the mistake that J. N. Darby fell into. As we saw, he sought to spread his influence and authority over many Assemblies, based upon the idea that the oneness of the Body of Christ was meant to be expressed by God beyond each locality to a collection of Assemblies world-wide that would basically agree with him and with the decisions of the Church in London, represented by the London Central Meeting. He demanded every Assembly, gathered in the Name of the Lord, to be of the same judgment in practice and, in many cases, in interpretations of Scripture (e.g. regarding Church governance, and in some cases, prophecy). In reality, that was a denominational mindset, in and of itself, for it excommunicated those Assemblies that would not acquiesce, beginning with the Assembly meeting in Bethesda Chapel. The Lord never ordered that there be such a world-wide manifestation of the unity of the Spirit, all so it could be a “visible unity” the world could “see.”

But (and this is the main difference) our Lord did order that the unity of the Spirit, be visibly manifested, first and foremost, in every local Church. For example, when Paul exhorted those Christians living in Philippi (i.e. those Christians who were a part of the local Church in Philippi) to be of one accord and of one mind, he was exhorting a “local Assembly” to be of one accord and one mind, for that is the type of oneness that can be visible the world on a “local scale.”

Philippians 2:1-2 Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. NKJV

And when he exhorted the Church in Corinth to be one in I Cor. 1:7, he, again, was speaking to a “local Church.” He was not expecting that every

Church on earth would also have the same mind and same judgment.⁸⁷ He knew that would not come about until the Millennium.

⁸⁷ The last phrase in the salutation of Paul in I Cor. 1: 1-2, does not mean he was also directly “addressing” his epistle to every Church in the entire world, for if that was the case he would not have used the preposition σὺν in the last phrase. Without that preposition, it then would have been understood as being addressed as follows: “Paul...to the Church of God ... to the ones sanctified in Christ Jesus called saints, to all the ones calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both theirs and ours.” In that manner without the preposition, the phrase, πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, (to all the ones calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ) would have then been truly designating them as additional addressees of the epistle. However, by inserting the preposition σὺν (with) before the prepositional phrase, the phrase is then construed, along with the verbal adjective κλητοῖς (called) and the noun ἁγίοις (saints), to the prepositional phrase ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (in Christ Jesus), so that the text is saying “Paul...to the Church of God ... to the ones sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called saints along with everyone who calls upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** in every place, both theirs and ours.” So he is saying that not only are those in Corinth “called” saints in Christ Jesus, so is everyone else who calls upon the name of the Lord, no matter where they might be. The emphasis is on the fact that everyone who calls on the Lord is a saint, not that everyone is also being directly addressed by Paul. Thus, he reminds them that they are not the only Christians in the world. God has many children scattered throughout the world and they are only one Church out of many, so they should not think of themselves more highly than they should (cf. Paul’s admonishment in I Cor. 14:36). Thus this added phrase was not only meant as an encouragement, that they are not alone and that they have many brethren throughout the world, but also as an admonishment, that they should not be puffed up as a Church, thinking they are the model Assembly all should follow (cf. I Cor. 4: 18-19 5:2 KJV).

However, in II Cor. 1:1 Paul does use the same preposition to include other Christians living in Achaia, so that in that epistle, unlike his first epistle, he is including a wider audience than just the Corinthian Church. But he makes that clear by repeating the verbal participle of εἰμί, οὖσιν, which ties it in the same verbal participle in the singular number used with the Church. So his repetition of the same verbal participle ties the two together. However, in I Cor. 1:2 he does not repeat that verbal participle, οὖσιν, used in connection with the Church in the first part of the verse, but repeats the participle for “calling,” ἐπικαλουμένοις, which seems to connect it with κλητοῖς rather than the previous participle οὖσιν. Therefore, it does not seem that II Cor. 1:1 should be taken to explain I Cor. 1:2, although the one cannot be dogmatic based upon the Greek grammar alone. But when one considers the normal flow of the text, it seems unlikely that Paul would be construing the prepositional phrase with anything else than with the verbal adjective κλητοῖς and the noun ἁγίοις. (For further

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

And, even though this should be true throughout the earth, and, indeed, one day will be true (when the Lord returns) Paul never imagined that it would be so in this dispensation of the Church, especially when such oneness of judgment is enforced through the creation of a man-made hierarchical structure of authority.

Paul knew such a thing was impossible when he wrote his epistles, for he knew that he, himself, was still opposed by some in the Church in Jerusalem, who believed that all Assemblies should conform and submit themselves to that one Church. And, not only that, he made it clear that he would never submit to them and their idea of hegemony, which, of course, meant, that Paul never believed the Churches of the Gentiles should submit or yield to such a mindset. This is why he declared the following in Gal. 2:5—

Galatians 2:5-6 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. ⁶ But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no

study regarding the Greek test, one can see such Greek stalwarts as Robertson, Olshausen, and Lenski.)

This does not mean, of course, that the epistle is not binding upon all Churches during this Church Age. Of course, it is, as is all of Scripture. Indeed, in I Cor. 14:37 Paul reminds them that he is writing the commands of the Lord and the commands of the Lord extend to all. The point is that the epistle was written specifically to a local Church, which means he respects the local autonomy of the Church in Corinth, and so chastises, praises, admonishes and exhorts them accordingly, which then means the exhortation of I Cor. 1:7 was specifically given to a local expression of the Church, although our hope should always be that every local Church agrees. But we know that will never be the case in this dispensation, which even Paul admits in I Cor. 11:19 and in I Cor. 11:13.

Nevertheless, even if one still views the epistle as being specifically addressed to all, they must still allow that liberty of judgment is given to Corinth in I Cor. 11:13, and so must then be granted to every local Assembly, throughout the world, for the imperative command of liberty to judge was given to them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and so to every Church. In other words, the Holy Spirit allowed diversity of judgment on issues not involving excommunicable offences (even though, as we already said, Corinth would have been wrong to ignore Paul's admonitions).

partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.
NASB

So obviously, this idea of a visible unity created by forced submissions to one Church wherein all Churches would walk in complete agreement and judgment was never contemplated in this dispensation, for Paul, himself, was not of the same mind and the same judgment with some of those in the Church of Jerusalem, who pretended to speak in the name of the apostles and the Church, and who felt they had the judgment of the Spirit. Nor were those same ones in Jerusalem content in granting the liberty of conscience to other Assemblies that would not follow their view of what constitutes the unity of the Spirit. (As we stated in Volume One, the false gospel also included a false means of sanctification that entailed their attempt to make the Church in Jerusalem as the center of the Spirit's unity on earth.)

Moreover, as we said before, if the Spirit of God told the Corinthian Assembly that they should judge for themselves, he granted the Assembly at Corinth the free will to disagree with the other Assemblies, and so, obviously, the Holy Spirit was not demanding a world-wide physical expression of oneness from every Church on earth, which the Holy Spirit would do if that is what the Lord Jesus asked from the Father. In other words, the Holy Spirit would never allow a Church to do something, if it was contrary to the wishes of the Son. That would be impossible. All Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity walk in complete unity and oneness. Thus, if Churches have the ability to disagree with the decisions of other Churches, being autonomous, the Lord Jesus in His prayer was not asking for a visible unity to be expressed by a large federation of Churches which walked in complete agreement on all judgments made.

Obviously, since Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit, his refusal to yield to the judgments of those Christians of high reputation in Jerusalem, and by his granting the Church in Corinth the liberty to disagree, Paul did not think that it destroyed a visible manifestation of oneness of the Body of Christ on earth to the world. In fact, even though the Churches in Asia disagreed with Corinth, they were able to remain in fellowship with Corinth (I Cor. 16:19). Why? If they imitate Paul, it was because they trusted that the Chief Shepherd would always shepherd each and every Assembly faithfully and wisely according to His own prerogative.

Furthermore, Paul did not believe he was breaking God's will by giving them this liberty of judgment, because it would somehow destroy a "visible unity" expected and ordered by the Lord (as our brother Darby believed). In fact, since Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it was not even Paul giving them this liberty or freedom to judge for themselves. It was the Holy Spirit, Himself.

Nevertheless (as an aside), it should never be forgotten, that just because liberty of judgment is granted to an Assembly, or, indeed, to an individual upon earth, or even to collective entities upon earth, like cities or nations, that liberty or free will does not guarantee correctness of action or practice. All are accountable to the LORD, whether it be individual Christians or local Churches (or even cities and nations—see Matt. 11:21-24). Everyone is accountable to God for any decision or action they take, both now and in the next dispensation.

II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before **the judgment seat of Christ**; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. KJV

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. KJV

So the question becomes, "Do we have the faith to allow this freedom within the parameters of Scripture, or are we busybodies, always involving ourselves with the daily affairs of other Assemblies, always insisting that they conform themselves to our own opinions and judgments, because we believe that creates a visible unity?" Paul had the faith to trust Christ in this, knowing that He would judge those who would not judge themselves (cf. I Cor.11:31), knowing that ultimately all would be held accountable to the Lord. He reminded the Assembly in Corinth of this and so admonished them to not be so puffed up as if they knew what was best for others. In fact, he was careful to not even justify himself before the Lord!

I Corinthians 4:3-6, 7 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. ⁴ For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. ⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. ⁶ And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think *of men* above that which is written,

that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. (KJV) ⁷ For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (NASB)

So, where does all this leave us? Certainly God desires a manifestation of oneness, for it is a manifestation of His very life. And He does, indeed, desire this oneness in His disciples to be witnessed by the world. But when all of Scripture is compared, we see that in this dispensation this oneness that would be witnessed by the world was primarily meant to be “seen” on a local level, not on a world-wide scale. Indeed, how could it be “seen” in any other way? Our brother Darby’s view that a union of Assemblies walking in tandem and with the same judgments created a visible unity that could be seen by the world simply was not true.

The oneness the world can *see* is a oneness that can be *seen*! And that can only be in a local Church that the world can physically walk into and *see* the body of Christ functioning, in both love and unity, being able to witness the life of Christ being manifested amongst His disciples, which, in turn, Scripture says, will cause them to bow down and declare that God is in the midst:

I Corinthians 14:23-25 If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, **and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;** ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and **so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.** NASB

In fact, as we will now discuss, nowhere in Scripture do we find it stated that God intended this oneness in the Church, mentioned in John 17, to be a oneness that was to be “seen” on a world-wide scale during this Church Age. That will come about when our Lord returns and He sets up His kingdom upon earth, when we are all physically gathered together around his throne at one time. But, until that time comes, how can that oneness or unity of the Spirit be “seen” by the world, when His Church is scattered throughout the earth? It cannot be seen! But it can be manifested in a way that can be seen, and that is on a local level!

Part of the reason our brother Darby insisted that many Assemblies follow the dictates of London, not only regarding the question of Bethesda, but also that of Sheffield, etc., was so that they could fulfill the Lord’s prayer in John 17 for a “visible unity” that the world could “see.” But, of course, as we already said, the world cannot see such a oneness

of Churches scattered about the earth by time and space. When it is daytime on earth where some Christians are meeting in an assembly, on the other side of the earth, Christians are sound asleep! So how can that be a visible oneness that can be seen? It cannot be. At the most, it is an “invisible” oneness of judgments and opinions, which the world will never be able to “see,” but will only be able to “hear” that it exists, because they are told that it does exist.

But our brother Darby ridiculed any Christian who believed that John 17:21 was referring to an invisible oneness, even calling it a sin! This assertion of his can be seen in the quote below.

“The invisible Church is null as a witness in this world, by the very fact of its invisibility. Rather would it serve as a witness of the powerlessness of the Spirit and the powerlessness of Christ Himself, to disengage His own from this world which has rejected Him, and to gather them in oneness by virtue of His Spirit, and as an evident demonstration of His glory - to gather them, as the faithful bride of His heart who belongs to Him alone...The invisible Church, as such, is null in testimony. It is the denial of the power of Christ to gather His own, to gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad, and to manifest in them, thus gathered, His power and glory.

That the Church, alas! is invisible, is but too true. **And if it is so, it is in a fallen condition, it is unfaithful to the glory of its Head,** it has failed of the object of its establishment on the earth. **To own such a truth as this, to confess it as a fearful sin,** a sin perhaps irremissible as to the integral re-establishment of God's system, to confess in this respect our sin and our iniquity, this is what places us in our true position on this point.

To justify such a state of things, to put it forward as regular and providential, as that which ought to be, **is to show hardness in sin;** it is to lack the heart and affections which seek the glory of Christ, and which show that we have the consciousness of our relationship with Him as His bride. How afflicting is this!⁸⁸

But he completely misunderstood what John 17 was referring to, and it caused him to become quite judgmental against those Christians who believed the oneness our Lord prayed for was an invisible oneness. He condemns them for believing the oneness was invisible, stating that to believe such a thing “is to show hardness in sin. But what is ironic is that his own words actually condemn himself! His own purported *ethereal*

⁸⁸ J. N. Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Ecclesiastical No. 2, Volume 4* (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames, 1962) pg. 34-35

oneness of all those Assemblies that follow his viewpoint is no more *visible* than the *invisible* oneness of all Churches that he refers to. They are both invisible! He is missing the point of the Saviour.

Our brother Darby says that anyone who says the oneness that Jesus prays for in John 17 is invisible to the world is simply wrong. However, let us think about it. Our Saviour includes every Christian in His prayer for oneness. And once we remember this, it will help us understand the limits of the visible expression of oneness in fellowship in this dispensation of the Church

John 17:18-21 “As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”¹⁹ “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”²⁰ **“I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;”**²¹ **that they may all be one;** even as Thou, Father, *art* in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. NASB

Those, who believe that the oneness Jesus prayed for was invisible, believe so because Jesus prays for a oneness of every single Christian from the Day of Pentecost to the day of the Rapture! How could there ever be a visible unity of those believers, as so many are now in heaven, while all the rest are here on earth? He clearly includes every believer in His prayer for oneness in John 17:20. So when certain Christians declare that this oneness is an *invisible spiritual oneness*, it is because in their mind it includes everyone in the Body of Christ and so it must be an invisible oneness for it crosses both time and space, encompassing two millennia and an entire world wherein one side of the world is asleep on the same day the other half is awake celebrating the Lord’s Day. Of course, that would have to be *invisible*, for the world cannot see some *ethereal oneness* of Churches meeting in different times and different cities, and even in different spheres, i.e. heaven and earth! It is, indeed, invisible to the world, but that does not make the oneness any less real.

So, in reality, our brother Darby is being contradictory, for he claims to have a visible oneness that the world can see as a fulfilment of the Lord’s prayer by having Assemblies walk in “common action” with him. But how is that any more visible than the oneness we mentioned above? The world cannot see that oneness of all those Assemblies scattered throughout the world, meeting at different times, separated by time and space, any more than they could see the oneness of all the Churches since the Day of Pentecost until now, separated by time (now twenty centuries) and space (two different spheres— heaven and earth).

Moreover, if someone says, “No, no, you misunderstand; our brother did not mean the world could literally *see* the spiritual oneness—of course that spiritual oneness is invisible, for it is spiritual! What he meant was they could *perceive* the oneness, by hearing that we are all one in Christ.” Well, fine enough, but if that is what he meant then he cannot ridicule and condemn all those other Christians who say the spiritual oneness that Christ prays for is invisible oneness encompassing time and space, for the world could also “perceive” that invisible oneness also by “hearing” that the Holy Spirit has placed all true believers into Christ because of a common salvation!

In other words, if some say, “Well the world can still perceive that we all agree together, even if we are separated by time and space.” Well, beloved, if that is the judgment as to what it means to have a visible unity, then there are many Assemblies in the world that could claim the same thing. It is not limited to him. For instance, those Assemblies that disagreed with our brother Darby, but agreed with Bethesda could claim to have a visible unity. Then there were Churches in his own day (called “Separatists,” although they refused that title, calling themselves simply Christian) who could claim the same thing. In fact, some of those who were called Separatists in his own day did claim to be the one true Church of God on earth expressing a visible oneness, just like our brother Darby claimed for himself and those Assemblies agreeing with him. If it is said that what our brother Darby meant was that this visible unity could be perceived because they all agreed, then those who were called Separatist could claim the exact same thing claimed by our brother Darby for they all agreed with each other and also walked in tandem and in the same judgment.

Our brother Darby is simply wrong to condemn Christians, who believe that the oneness our Lord prays for is invisible. He is wrong to say that those Christians are in a “fallen condition,” and are being “unfaithful to the glory of its Head.” Now no doubt there are Christians and Churches who are unfaithful to the glory of Christ, but it is not because they believe the oneness of John 17:21 is invisible! For if it is, then our brother Darby must include himself in the condemnation, for the oneness our brother Darby claims for himself and those Assemblies with him is also invisible to the world! And if that is his definition of seeing a oneness, meaning a number of Assemblies walking in communion with London, then many other Assemblies in the world could claim the same thing, walking in communion among themselves, and so be fulfilling John 17 in the same way he claims he was fulfilling John 17.

What is so unfortunate with this type of exclusive thinking is that it begets narrower and narrower thinking, which each believing they are the only ones maintaining a visible unity. As time went on there were other Assemblies, who separated from our brother Darby and what they perceived was evil in those Assemblies who followed him, and so they believed that they then became the only true Church expressing a visible oneness! And then there later on, there were other Assemblies who divided from those Assemblies that first divided from Darby and London, who then claimed the same thing, and then later another division arose, and so on and so on. And they all claimed to be the only true Church manifesting a visible unity, yet all their supposed *oneness and unity* was still invisible to the world!

Now, if all those Churches around the world, who agreed with our brother Darby, could somehow come together and somehow all meet together in one prescribed locality every Lord's day, then, yes, the world could *see* that oneness they purported, but if not, the world could not see their *ethereal* oneness, any more than they could see the invisible *spiritual* oneness that truly exists in Christ Jesus between all Churches on the earth, irrespective of time and space. So our brother's thought that he could separate his way from evil, unto a visible oneness of many like-minded Assemblies, which the world could see in fulfilment of John 17:21, was simply false and misguided.

But, beloved, as we already briefly mentioned, there is a oneness Scripture speaks about that the world can see, and can physically see, and not just perceive, and that would be a oneness manifested on a local scale in a local Church meeting that someone from the world could physically enter. And this could be seen every Lord's Day! It can even be seen in as small a gathering where two or three are physically gathered together in His Name. But it can only ever be seen locally. So, if we took a multitude of little Assemblies of just two or three, and scattered them throughout the earth, but who nonetheless still agreed in every matter, their oneness or agreement between them would still invisible to the world, because it can only be physically seen in a local gathering, into which the world can physically walk. That is a oneness that can be seen!

Or let us consider another example; let us use the example of all the many house Churches in Jerusalem during those early days of the Church (Acts 2:46). Each house Church would have been the sole limit of someone from the world being able to witness the oneness of the Body of Christ, that is, unless those many house Churches also gathered together

in a larger place, which, of course, is exactly what happened. Scripture says that they also gathered together in Solomon's Portico in the Temple (Acts 5:12). As such, when that occurred, the visible oneness that could be seen in each local house Church, would then become a visible in a larger way, for that oneness could now be seen on a much larger scale, being made visible by thousands and thousands of Christians meeting together within the Temple Court in one place.

So there would have been a oneness the world could see in each house Church, and there would have been a oneness that could be a visible on a city-wide basis when all those house Churches all met together on the Temple Mount, but that was the extent of that oneness being manifested in a visible way. It could not be seen on a larger scale, that being, of course, a visible oneness of every other Church in Judea, for all those other Churches in Judea did not gather together in one place!

In other words, in Scripture there was no such thing as the Church of Judea; there only was the Churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22). In the same way, there was no visible oneness of the Church of Galatia, because there was no Church of Galatia, only Churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2).⁸⁹ But if all the Churches of Galatia travelled to one place and gathered together in the Name of the Lord, then that oneness could be seen by the world if they came to that meeting. And, indeed, if all the Churches on the earth could meet in one place that oneness could be seen and witnessed by the world (which, of course, will one day happen when the Lord comes back and we are gathered together with Him in the air!). But until that time comes it can only be seen in proportion to the largeness of the gathering that occurs in any one place.

(Perhaps, it should be mentioned that because of today's mass transportation, a situation exists where the world also has the possibility of witnessing the oneness of the Spirit being manifested by many different saints coming together from many different Assemblies unto one place like in a Bible Conference setting, where they might break bread on a Sunday morning before dispersing.)

So we can see our fellowship, for the purposes of manifesting the oneness of the Body of Christ, is limited by the actual physical place of our meeting. This is the limit of fellowship in regard to a visible oneness

⁸⁹ For a full definition of the word "Church," see the chapter, "Meaning of Ekklesia (Church)," in volume I of this book.

of the unity of the Spirit. It is manifested in a local Church, and, indeed, should be manifested each and every Lord's Day in each local Church, as it is gathered together around the Table of the Lord to remember Him. But, even though, it can only be visibly *manifested* in one locality at a time, it still exists and encompasses many localities in an invisible manner! And, our hearts should be of such a nature that if the Lord somehow could call all His Churches together one Sunday to meet in one place, we would naturally be just as one with all our other brethren we have not seen, as with the brethren we do see every Lord's Day.

The actual unity of the Spirit that encompasses every believer in heaven from times past, and every believer on earth from times present, is spiritual and invisible to the world, and will always be in this dispensation of grace. It is a oneness that is composed of every true believer that has ever been baptized into the body of Christ. That existence is wider than just a local Church, for it includes every child of God, no matter where they exist on earth, and it includes every child of God for the last two millennia.

You see, beloved, what many fail to recognize is that if we look closely at what our Lord prayed, nowhere in John 17 did our Lord actually pray to the Father for a oneness that could be “**seen**,” or a oneness that would be a “**visible unity**” for the world to see! Let me repeat that again. Nowhere in John 17 did our Lord pray to the Father for a oneness that could be “seen,” or a oneness that would be a “visible” oneness for the world to see! In fact, He never uses the word “visible,” or the word “seen” in those parts of His prayer regarding oneness. “He prays that they may be one so that two things would be possible to the world. First, so that the world might “**believe**” that God the Father sent the Son, and second so that the world would might “**know**” that the Lord Jesus was sent by God the Father. And neither of those two things requires visibility.

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may **believe** that thou hast sent me. NASB

John 17:23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may **know** that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. KJV

So when our brother Darby says that, “that which Christ asks for, is a visible unity,”⁹⁰ he is simply wrong and in error.

As such, if Christ was not praying for a visible unity by his request for oneness, we are left with the question as to why would being “one” make it possible that the world might **believe** and come to **know** that the Lord Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father? The answer, of course, is simply because by being one in Christ, every disciple is saved, and is forgiven, which means they have been justified by God, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, so that God can righteously use them to proclaim the Gospel of God’s grace to a dying world!

What many do not realize is that our Lord is talking about an essential ingredient for being saved, and that is our oneness with Christ. Without that oneness no one could be saved. Our Lord Jesus is not praying for a **visible** oneness. He is praying for a **spiritual** oneness, which is **invisible** to the naked eye, for it is spiritual!

John 3:7-8 “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’⁸ **“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from** and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” NASB

The oneness our Lord Jesus prays for is the oneness that results from our being born of God the Father, through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit—and that being born of the Spirit is likened to wind that is invisible! When we are born of the Spirit, He baptizes us into Christ Jesus. And all this is invisible to the world! This is the oneness the Lord prays for, and that oneness will always be invisible to the world!

This oneness happens when we believe. Every believer is baptized into one body upon belief. They are placed into Christ Jesus. Oneness is found in Him alone. If we are not “in Christ,” if we are not in union with Him, we cannot be one, let alone, saved, or given eternal life. If oneness is to exist, we must be in Christ and Paul refers to our being placed into Christ Jesus in Roman 6:3 when he writes—

⁹⁰ J. N. Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Ecclesiastical No. 2, Volume 4* (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames, 1962) pg. 34-35

Romans 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? KJV

This occurs at the moment we believe and becomes the basis for our subsequent water baptism. William MacDonald speaks of this as follows in his commentary—

“When a person is saved, he is baptized into Christ Jesus in the sense that he is identified with Christ in His death and resurrection...When Paul speaks of baptism here, he is thinking both of our spiritual identification with Christ and of its portrayal in water baptism. But as the argument advances, he seems to shift his emphasis in a special way to water baptism.”⁹¹

And in I Cor. 12:12-13 Paul reveals to us that our being baptized into Christ, as he mentions in Rom. 6:3, also results in our being one body.

I Corinthians 12:12-13 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ.¹³ For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. KJV

What is so important to note in this verse is that Paul is not saying that we are baptized into some ethereal body, i.e. the Church, which is separate and apart from Christ. No, no. We are baptized into a Church that is intimately united to Christ. Now, we must be careful to not exceed what is written, but we must also be careful to not interpret a verse apart from the fuller context of Scripture. We should not divorce I Cor. 12:13 from Rom. 6:3. They are both revelatory of a great mystery that occurs when we are saved.

The body into which we are baptized by the Spirit is the body of Christ, which Paul further reveals for us, in Eph. 1:22-23, is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all, and is the body of which He is the Head.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,²³ Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. KJV

⁹¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995) pg. 1701

And then, but a few verses later, he continues this unfolding revelation of our salvation and membership in the body of Christ. Paul reveals in Eph. 2:10-15 that this body, this Church, is not something unconnected and separate from Christ, but is something that is intimately connected and united to Christ, all because of His precious blood. Paul says that the Church is made one as a new man in Christ, not outside of and separated from Him, i.e. our Saviour, but, rather, made one in Him, or as he says **in Himself**, *so* making peace!

Ephesians 2:10-15 For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. ¹¹ Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³ But **now in Christ Jesus** ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who **hath made both one**, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; ¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; **for to make in himself** of twain one new man, *so* making peace. KJV

So the question naturally arises as to how we become a member of this body which is made one in Himself. How are we placed into Him to be part of this Church? The answer is what Paul said in I Cor. 12:13. It is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes this when we believe, at which time are baptized into one body, the body of Christ, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all, made one of both Jew and Gentiles “in Himself!”

And, then in Eph. 4:3 Paul exhorts us to maintain this unity or oneness that is made in Him, and, finally in Eph. 5:28-32, he reveals that this wonderful union is a great mystery, wherein he also reveals that we are “of his flesh, and of his bones.” Truly one must admit this is a great mystery!

Ephesians 5:28-32 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. ²⁹ For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: ³⁰ **For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.** ³¹ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ³² This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

This added wonderful revelation of being “of his flesh, and of his bones” completes the revelation he began in the first chapter of this epistle in Eph. 1:22-23, as well as what he revealed in Rom. 6:3 and I Cor. 12:12-13?

Now, I do not pretend to fully understand this great mystery, but by faith I believe it. Somehow we are of his flesh and of his bones (which, of course, must refer in some way to the Human Nature of Christ and not to his Divine Nature, as the Divine Nature has not flesh and bones). Why? What is the significance of this final revelation of the body of Christ which is the Church? Let me quote from something I wrote in the first volume of this book about this great mystery, regarding this phrase, *of his flesh and of his bones*, that more than likely was used by Paul “because Paul was making an allusion to Eve in the book of Genesis. Eve was “of” the bone and of the flesh of Adam, because she was “out of Adam,” that is, from his side or rib (Gen. 2:21-23). She was a picture of the Church, the Bride of Christ. The Church that the Lord Jesus Christ will build will be from Him and will, thus, mystically, be a part of Him. Christ is the head and we are His body. We are from Him, as Eve was from Adam, (who was a type of Christ - Rom. 5:14). This is why the baptism of the Spirit, whereby we are placed into the Body of Christ, accompanies salvation. We cannot be a part of the Body of Christ, the Church, unless we are first baptized into Christ, being made members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. We are baptized into the Body of Christ, the humanity of Christ by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13), so that we can be “of Him,” and by His side.

And so we see that the baptism of the Spirit was a magnificent occurrence in time. The Church which was known by God from all of eternity suddenly came into existence because the baptism of the Spirit, which Jesus said would happen, happened! The Holy Spirit of God the Father baptized believers into the body of His dear Son. This was one of the goals of the incarnation! The Son took upon himself Human Nature so that we might be baptized into Him, being made members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones, and so we might be forever in Him—joined by the Spirit with Him!⁹²

⁹² Of course, man can never be a part of the Godhead. The finite can never be a part of the infinite. Only the Father, Son and Holy Spirit possess the one and same Divine Substance. The Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial with the Father. We can never be. But praise God, the Son was made flesh and dwelt among us, coming in the likeness of sinful flesh to die upon the cross for our sins. He shed His blood upon the cross so that we might be cleansed from all

So we see that when a person believes they are baptized into Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:3), which means they are baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body (I Cor. 12:13), of which Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:22), in which many are made one in Him (Eph. 2:14-15), and from which all are “of His flesh, and of His bones.” This is the great mystery, our oneness in and with Christ.

unrighteousness. His Human Nature was unionized with His Divine Nature in One Person, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation so that those who put their faith in Him and His work upon the cross might be baptized into Him, being made members of His body. And since we are in Him and His Human Nature is forever unionized with His Divine Nature in One Person, how can we ever be separated from the Person of Christ! We will forever be in Him and “of His flesh and of His bones.” Hallelujah! This is part of our guarantee of eternal salvation! Our Saviour will never divide Himself from that with which He has allowed to be joined unto Him. Once we are joined to the Lord by the Spirit (cf. I Cor. 6:17), thereby being made members of His body, we can never lose our salvation for we will always forever be joined to Him in some way; we will forever be safe in the arms of Jesus. Indeed, this mystery is great as Paul says in Eph. 5:32 and we should leave it at that and never try to logically extrapolate it with further thoughts or conjectures that may exceed what is written (I Cor. 4:6). As an example, someone might conclude, because of this truth, that somehow the Church becomes an extension of the incarnation of our Lord. That could never be for there is only one Mediator between God and man—the Man Christ Jesus (I Tim.2:5)—He, who is, and ever will be, God manifested in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16). Also, since the incarnation is the unionization of two natures in one Person, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation, no human being could ever be, by definition, a part of that incarnation. To teach otherwise would be a heretical. It seems the truth that Paul is wishing to convey is that the Church is forever unionized with Christ. We will forever be in Christ, because we are a new creation made in Him (Eph. 2:15). And yet, Paul introduces the imagery of the Church (just like Eve who was taken out from Adam’s side) being presented to Him as his Bride (Eph. 5:27). The phrase Paul uses in Eph. 5:30 could literally be rendered, “out of his flesh, and out of his bones” (although he never explains how that works, or what that means). It seems the most we can say is that because the Son “was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3), and because of His finished work upon the cross, and because of His death, burial, and resurrection, all that we have, and all that we are, is in Him and from Him, such as His righteousness, which is imputed to us, or His life, which is given to us (John 10:28; 17:2). To say anything more, I am afraid, would exceed what is written. Again, this is why it is a great mystery which should be accepted in its grand simplicity, and yet, its grand profundity. We should never forget that the intricacies of our unionization with Christ were not revealed to us by God. Perhaps one day they will be, but for now the secret things belong to God (Deut. 29:29). As such, it is best for us to leave it at that.

This is an oneness and an “invisible unity” that is not seen by the world, but is, nonetheless, an eternal reality that will never change. Our salvation is secure because we are united in Him. That is the invisible, yet real unity of the Spirit, whereby we are in Him and He is in us, as our Lord prays in John 17:21-23, all so that we might live in the power of that oneness and unity in this world. Why?—so that we might go forth in this world as His new creation to proclaim the good news of God’s grace so that the world might **believe** and **know** that Jesus Christ was sent by God, He who is the Way, the Truth and the Life!

Our brother MacDonald had a wonderful comment on this verse, regarding our being made members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. He says—

“5:30 For we are members of His body. The grace of God is amazing! It not only saves us from sin and hell, but incorporates us into Christ as **members of His mystical Body**. What volumes this speaks concerning His love for us: He cherishes us as His own Body. What care: He nourishes, sanctifies, and trains us. What Security: He will not be in heaven without His **members**. We are united to Him in a common life. Whatever affects the members affects the Head also.”⁹³

And so now we can understand the “why” of our Lord’s prayer in John 17. Nowhere do we see our Lord pray for a visible oneness or unity, as our brother Darby intimates. On the contrary, we see our Lord praying for a mystical and invisible oneness, whereby every Christian, having been saved and forgiven by His blood, is made one in Him as a new creation, by our being baptized by the Spirit into Him, into His body, the Church, which is of his flesh and of his bones, so that by being unionized with Him, we might go forth as a new creation to proclaim the good news of salvation to those who are lost, so that the world might **believe** and **know** that Jesus Christ was sent by God. If not for the oneness of our salvation, wherein we receive all that we need, we could never be witnesses to a dying world that so desperately needs to believe and know that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (II Cor. 5:17-19).

II Corinthians 5:17-19 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, **he is a new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.¹⁸ Now all

⁹³ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995) pg. 1949

things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. NKJV

Indeed, this necessary oneness in Christ Jesus that comes from His sanctification of Himself and our subsequent new birth and baptism by the Spirit into His body is the reason why the Lord told His disciples to wait for the promise of the Spirit before they began their witness in Jerusalem unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 1:4, 8 And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. KJV

Even though they were already sent into the world, being commissioned in Matt. 28:19, they still had to wait before they began their witness to a dying world because their spiritual oneness with each other and with Christ (which was invisible) needed to occur first. They were commanded to wait (for they were not yet baptized into the body of Christ) until that Day of Pentecost came, wherein came about the oneness of John 17:21, whereby they were made one by being baptized into Christ Jesus, which meant they were one in Christ, and through the Son, also in God their Father in heaven.

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, **that they also may be one in us**: that the world may **believe** that thou hast sent me. NASB

In other words, that oneness was their endowment of power from above that allowed them to preach the Gospel to the world so the world could believe and know that Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father!

Luke 24:46-49 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:⁴⁷ And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.⁴⁸ And ye are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. KJV

How wonderful is this oneness gained for us by our Lord! It unites us together with Him and each other for all eternity, and it is part of our spiritual heritage that is given to us when we believe.

This is the meaning of the spiritual oneness in John 17. It is the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, if you will, that is invisible to the world, but is the common possession of every true believer. Without this oneness, without our new birth and salvation, we could never be witnesses for God in the power of the Spirit that brings conviction to the world so that they too may believe and know. It is invisible and has nothing to do with some *ethereal* oneness (that purports to be visible), created by a union of Churches, who are separated by time and space, held outwardly together by enforced judgments and man-made traditions.

Thus we see that our brother is wrong to say what he said above, that “the invisible Church is null as a witness in this world, by the very fact of its invisibility.” The opposite is actually true. The invisible Church which consists of every true believer on the earth that is in Christ is a powerful witness to the world. Why?—Because that invisible oneness that exists by the Spirit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus is found in the One who is far above all rule and authority and any name that is named. And because of His position, and our position in Him, in whom we have been made one, we are able to become powerful witnesses to a world that is lost in darkness and sin.

Ephesians 1:18-23 *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*¹⁹ *and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might*²⁰ *which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,*²¹ *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.*²² *And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,*²³ *which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.* NASB

And, not only that, we also see that our brother’s statement that the invisible Church is nothing but a “witness of the powerlessness of the Spirit and the powerlessness of Christ Himself” is wrong and is actually the complete opposite of the truth! The power of the Spirit and the power of Christ Himself is made known by all those who are invisibly united to Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Why?—because on earth we are kept by Him in this world (John 17:15) as we wrestle

against “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12).

This is not a “witness of the powerlessness of the Spirit and the powerlessness of Christ,” but is rather the opposite, a witness of the great strength of the Christ Jesus our Lord and “the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10b). This invisible oneness and unity allows us to be strong “in” Him and the strength of His might, so that the world might hear the Gospel of peace and be saved.

Ephesians 6:10-19 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.¹² For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.¹³ Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.¹⁴ Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;¹⁵ **And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;**¹⁶ Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;¹⁹ And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel. KJV

And so we see, beloved, that technically speaking the Lord did not pray that we might be one so the world can believe by “visibly seeing” that oneness. He prayed that we might be one so that the world can believe by “audibly hearing” the Gospel of peace. In other words, we receive all the benefits of that oneness or salvation, so that, according to Rom. 10:14-15, 17, the world might “**hear**” (he does not say see), and so believe.

Romans 10:14-15, 17 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they **believe** in him of whom they have not **heard**? and how shall they **hear without a preacher**?¹⁵ And how shall they preach, **except they be sent**? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!¹⁷ So then **faith cometh by hearing**, and hearing by the word of God. KJV

But that does mean, beloved, that a visible unity is not important to God? God forbid. Our visible unity is still very important and pleasing to God. Even though the oneness in John 17 is invisible and cannot be seen by the world, there still is, generally speaking, according to I Cor. 14:24-25,

a unity that the world can see, and a unity or oneness that is physically visible to dying world as we said before, and, which we should not forget, but rather should pray for. It is the visible unity that can be found in every local Church, wherein someone from the world can physically walk into a meeting place and literally see and witness a oneness that is being manifested by the Spirit of God, in an assembly which is gathered together in the Name of the Lord.

I Corinthians 14:24-25 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. NASB

This is the oneness the Scripture does say the world can “see,” because it can literally “see” Christians gathered in His Name in one local and physical gathering, in which Christ is being honoured and the gifts of the Spirit are being expressed.

Paul also speaks of this visible oneness being seen in Phil. 1:27.

Philippians 1:27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether **I come and see you** or remain absent, I may **hear** of you that you are **standing firm in one spirit**, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. NASB

If Paul comes to them, he says he could then visibly “see” that they are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving for the faith of the Gospel. But if he could not come, he says he could then “hear” of their oneness in Spirit.

And so, even though there will always be a limit to the visible manifestation of our oneness in fellowship with other believers upon earth, limited by the actual size of our gathering place in any one particular place, there will never be a limit on the extent of our fellowship in Christ Jesus, for that fellowship is based upon that wonderful invisible unity and oneness of salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dear brethren, it is that fellowship that should be emphasized by every true believer in Christ, and not a supposed “visible unity” that is maintained by wholesale excommunications, and repeated separations from evil, wherein the circle of such visible unity becomes smaller and smaller, rather than greater and greater, for each new division creates a

smaller circle of a supposed unity, because more Assemblies become judged as not being sufficiently separated from evil by some new standard of righteousness, which means, in turn, they must be excluded.

(And, unfortunately, that is exactly what happened to those who followed our brother Darby and his theory of separation from evil. As a matter of fact, ultimately, his own theory put himself out of what some were viewing as the true Church of God upon earth, for he, himself, was accused of not separating sufficiently from evil!)

All this was done under the false impression that these “separations from evil” created a visible oneness that the world could “see.” Unfortunately, it did not but rather showed nothing but a carnal, soulical division of one brother from another.

True fellowship of the Spirit entails recognizing and respecting the liberty and autonomy of each and every local Assembly, united together by the invisible oneness of salvation, under the sole Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ, shepherded by His wise guidance, along with those local elders (or leading brothers), first appointed, and then guided by the Holy Spirit. Thus true fellowship of the Spirit will always be based upon mutual respect and recognition, not upon lordship and enforced hierarchal standards, which is really nothing else than another form of invisible clericalism. And this brings us to our final point. How is this fellowship based upon the invisible oneness of our salvation to be practiced?

Extent of Fellowship

II Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and **the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**, be with you all. NASB

Our practice of this wonderful and invisible, yet real fellowship of the Spirit with other saints and all Assemblies in the world is expressed through many things, such as prayer for all the saints—

Eph 6:18 “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication **for all saints.**” KJV

It is expressed in such things as ministry to those saints, whether in things physical, or things spiritual—

II Cor. 8:1-4 “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much **urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.**” NKJV

Rom 15:27 “It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers **of their spiritual things**, their duty is also **to minister to them in material things.**” NKJV

I Cor. 9:11 “If we have sown **spiritual things** for you, is it a great thing if we reap your **material things**?” NKJV

This fellowship is expressed by our fidelity to the truth and to the Faith, with those saints who also hold fast and contend earnestly for the Faith—

Acts 2:46 “And they **continued stedfastly** in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” KJV

Jude 1:3 “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you **contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.**” NASB

It is expressed by our care in love for every member of the body of Christ—

I Cor. 12:26 “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.” KJV

It's expressed through spiritual edification—

I Cor. 14:12 “So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.” NASB

And, finally, it is expressed through mutual respect of each one's liberty in Christ.

I Corinthians 11:13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with head* uncovered? NASB

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. KJV

This is the true fellowship of the Spirit practiced by the early Church and encouraged by the Apostle Paul. He never attempted to broaden the authority of each local Church into a broad federation of Churches that he thought was necessary to properly manifest the oneness of the Spirit in order to bring glory to Christ. In fact, he opposed those from the Church in Jerusalem who attempted to do that very thing. But he never abandoned his fellowship with them either—never submitting to them, but always speaking the truth to them in love, and examining all things and clinging to that which was good.

If I may, let me conclude, as I began, with another quote by A. N. Groves, one of those early brothers, who first met in Dublin according to these New Testament principles of fellowship and Church order, meeting with those same brothers with whom J. N. Darby also first met, before he ever abandoned those principles and followed his own.

“With respect to our communion with congregations, where the chaff and the wheat are mixed in all conceivable proportions between the extremes of the almost unmixt abominations of the apostate churches, where no souls are converted under the public ministrations, to the most pure and spiritual ministry, where sinners are converted and saints edified in love, till they grow up into the stature of perfect men in Christ, it is evident that we must consider ourselves in the double position of individuals who have duties they owe themselves, and, secondly, as members of an immense brotherhood, embracing the universal Catholic Church [please see footnote below] ⁹⁴ throughout the world, in all the

⁹⁴ Of course, brother Groves was not referring to the Roman Catholic Church, but is simply referring to the universal Church consisting of every true believer in Christ. The word “Catholic” refers to the whole. It means “universal” or “general.” It was a more common adjective used by Christians in the 19th century, than it is now for the very reason I am providing this footnote—many think it must refer to the Roman Catholic Church. But it does not. It was simply a common adjective that was used to indicate generality. For example, the

congregations of the saints, where Christ still walks amidst the golden candlesticks, notwithstanding unnumbered weaknesses and errors.”

“The first duty to ourselves is in selecting the congregation with whom we should stately worship; it should be where the form is most scriptural in our persuasion, and the ministrations most spiritual; where there is the sweetest savour of Christ; where our own souls are most edified; where the Lord is most manifestly present with those who minister and those who hear. This is what we owe the Lord, the Church of God, and our own souls. Considering, however, agreement in what we think best as to form of worship altogether secondary to heart-agreement in the mystery of Christ and of godliness. These, then, appear the principles that ought to govern our selection, as individuals, of the place where we stately worship, since personally we cannot be with all.”

“Yet as to our liberty in Christ to worship with any congregation under heaven where He manifests himself to bless and to save, can there be in any Christian mind a doubt? If my Lord should say to me, in any congregation of the almost unnumbered sections of the Church, “What dost thou here?” I would reply, “Seeing Thou wert here to save and sanctify, I felt it safe to be with Thee.” If He again said, as perhaps He may among most of us, “Didst thou not see abominations here, an admixture of that which was unscriptural, and the absence of that which was scriptural, and in some points error, at least in your judgment?” my answer would be, ‘Yea, Lord, but I dared not call that place unholy where Thou wert present to bless, nor by refusing communion in worship reject those as unholy whom Thou hadst by Thy saving power evidently sanctified and set apart for Thine own.’”

“Our reason for rejecting the congregations of apostate bodies is that Christ doth not manifest Himself among them in their public character, though He may save some individuals as brands plucked from the burning. To these churches we cry, standing on the outside, “Come out of her, my people; come out of her.” Among the others we stand, as the Son of Man, or rather with Him, in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (Rev. i, 13), telling them to remember their first love, first purity, and first work in all holy doctrine and discipline, lest the Lord

epistles of James to the epistle of Jude in the New Testament were commonly called the Catholic Epistles in the 19th century. In fact, one of William Kelly’s commentaries was titled, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Acts, the Catholic Epistles, and the Revelation*. But today these same epistles are now known by many as the General Epistles.

take away their candlesticks; but we would rather linger, in hope the impending judgment may be stayed, or some yet repent, than say, like Edom, in the day of Judah's sorrows, 'Down with her, down with her, even to the ground.' (See also Obadiah, x, 14.)"

"To the question, 'Are we not countenancing error by this plan?' our answer is, that if we must appear to countenance error, or discountenance brotherly love, and the visible union of the Church of God, we prefer the former, hoping that our lives and our tongues may be allowed by the Lord so intelligibly to speak that at last our righteousness shall be allowed to appear; but if not, still we may feel we have chosen the better part, since we tarried only for our Lord's departure; and as the candlestick retired, and its light vanished, we pronounce our sad farewell; but so long as Christ dwells in an individual, or walks in the midst of a congregation, blessing the ministrations to the conversion and edification of souls, we dare not denounce and formally withdraw from either, for fear of the awful sin of schism, of sin against Christ and His mystical body." ⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Anthony Norris Groves, *Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves: containing extracts from his letters and journals* (James Nisbet & Co., London, 1857), pg. 533-535

Concluding Remarks on the Unity of the Spirit

In conclusion, let us sum up all that we have seen regarding the fellowship of the Spirit as it is practiced in Scripture.

1) Scripture does not allow a hierarchical structure of authority between Assemblies.

The only order of governance that exists in any local Assembly is the elders or pastors of the Church, and then, above them, the Chief Shepherd who pastors, and if needed, disciplines each and every Church individually. This fact is demonstrated for us succinctly in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation. Among those Churches in Asia there is no hierarchical structure where the other Churches exist under another Church. Each Church answered directly to the Lord and each Church was commanded by the Lord Jesus to listen to what the Spirit saying to each and every Church through the spiritual authority of the apostle John.

Later on in Church history, unfortunately, such a thing did occur among those Churches in Asia, when the clergy/laity system was established. At that time, the Church in Ephesus did, indeed, become the Metropolitan See of that area, so that other Churches were then expected to respect any decisions that was made by that See or Assembly (i.e. as instructed within the parameters of Canon Law). This created a system whereby all Churches of a province took direction from the Church that was the Metropolitan See of their area.

And then, gradually over time (in the West), these Metropolitan Sees, in turn submitted to the Roman See, called the Holy See, wherein the Pope, the Bishop of Rome was considered to be the earthly head of all. Of course, in the East, among the Orthodox Churches their Sees continued apart from Rome with the See at Constantinople carrying the most spiritual weight, yet still considered one See among many. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, a hierarchy continued within those Churches also, with each Church answering to its own Patriarch or See.

But that was not the case with these seven Churches in the province of Asia when John wrote the Book of Revelation. Each Assembly was autonomous, answerable directly to the Lord. There was no Metropolitan See, no Pope, and no Patriarch. They were all equal and autonomous

Assemblies with Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd. Only He could excommunicate an entire Assembly, indicated by the imagery of a lampstand being removed from its place, i.e. from the city (cf. Rev. 2:5).

So, we see that fellowship between the Assemblies was done with mutual respect and full recognition of each one's autonomy and responsibility to their Chief Pastor or Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. And as I said in the first volume, even with the Corinthian Church, as carnal as it was, Paul was careful to respect its local character as an autonomous Assembly with responsibility to Christ as its Head. He clearly told the Corinthians that he would not "lord" it over their faith, which means he recognized their autonomy and independence as a local Church under Christ (II Cor. 1:24).

2) Paul respected a liberty of judgment between Assemblies.

Certain decisions were left to their own discretion, even though he and other Assemblies might disagree and feel otherwise (I Cor. 11:13-16). He would not lord it over their faith, and/or liberty. Now, he clearly exhorted the Church in Corinth to follow his exhortation, even mentioning in I Cor. 14:37 that what he wrote were the commands of the Lord, and yet, he told them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to "judge for yourselves" (which, of course, would also be one of the commands of Scripture he referred to in I Cor. 14:37!). Why would he do that? The reason is because he felt he needed to respect their own autonomy, reserving the ultimate decision to their own judgment, knowing the Chief Shepherd would always discipline His flock when needed. The Apostle Paul would never "lord" it over the saints, for in his eyes, each Church was individually accountable to the LORD, not to him in some hierarchical position of authority, and certainly not to any hierarchy authority of Churches. He truly believed the Lord "oversaw" His Churches, and Paul would not dream of usurping that position of the Chief Shepherd and Bishop, even though he was an apostle of Christ. He believed only the Messiah could "lord" it over the Churches, for that was His and only His prerogative. He did not view Christ as a figurehead, removed from the day to day activities of His Churches, but rather as an active Lord, lording over each Church as its Chief Shepherd or Pastor!

Thus, while the customs or practices of other Churches were important, they could not be imposed upon other Churches. Paul understood that each Church would stand or fall, not before another Church, but before

the Lord. He trusted that the Lord, as Chief Shepherd, would deal with any Church which failed to follow the dictates of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Scripture. Paul was never afraid to exercise his spiritual or moral authority. Indeed, he was not afraid to give commands in the name of the Lord to individual Churches. But the ultimate decision of whether a Church would listen or obey his admonitions was left to each Assembly. Paul could do this because he trusted in the true hierarchical structure of authority that did exist among the Churches, an authority that Paul was never presumptuous enough to usurp, even as an apostle of Christ. It was the authority of the LORD Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd and High Priest directly over each and every Assembly.

If Rome had remembered this truth, they would not have dictated things to other Churches. If Metropolitan Sees had remembered this, they would not have dictated or controlled certain things within the other Churches of their area. And, indeed, if brother Darby had remembered this, he would not have dictated things to other Assemblies, either directly or indirectly. This would have saved many in the Assemblies from experiencing all the heartache of division.

The system our brother Darby created, unfortunately, was too similar, to those early hierarchical structures adopted by the Church shortly after the death of the Apostles. And, bringing it up to modern times, it was similar to the hierarchical mindset of the Church of England and Ireland, out of which our brother Darby came, being at first an ordained priest in the early days of his life. Even though he came out of it because he considered it a Church in ruins, he apparently did not consider the mindset that allowed a hierarchical structure between Churches to exist to be part of those ruins, for he adopted a similar type of hierarchical structure between the Assemblies. Obviously, he did not adopt the hierarchical nomenclatures of such a system, such as parish, diocese, and province, etc., but he nevertheless adopted the authoritarian mindset, with its expected submissions, that were behind those nomenclatures. In fact his authoritarian attitudes regarding expected submissions of one Church to another became so well-known to those on the outside that even one who still resided in the Anglican Communion recognized its existence in him.

A certain George T. Stokes, who was a priest like Darby in the Church of Ireland, recognized this mindset in him. Moreover, not only was George T. Stokes an Irish clergyman, he also was a Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Trinity College, Dublin, the very college Darby attended; and

so, if anyone from the outside would have been able to discern such structured attitudes and mindsets in another, it would have been George T. Stokes, because he continued to function within that structured hierarchy of the Church in Ireland. Yet, even though he existed in his own structured hierarchy, even he thought our brother Darby went too far in his authoritarian ways. This is what he wrote over a hundred years ago.

“The spirit of division has, however, increased as years rolled on, and the Brethren who started only half a century ago to present the world with the spectacle of a visibly united communion, have ended by creating a fresh schism in their own ranks every five or six years...As for Darby, he pursued the even tenor of his way till the end came; developing, however, strangely enough ever higher and higher claims for his own party. Those who agreed with him were the Church of God upon earth. Those who disagreed with him on any point of doctrine or of discipline, he excommunicated at once, and regarded as outside the covenanted mercies of God.

During the later years of his life he lived at the Priory, Islington, which, during the decade between 1870 and 1880, was regarded by his followers as a kind of local Vatican, whence issued decrees on all topics, demanding instant and un murmuring obedience. Why, even the very change of a meeting from one locality to another without permission was regarded as an act of carnal self-pleasing and rebellion, and punished as such.

And the end of a movement for spiritual independence and in defence of the rights of the individual Christian conscience was a very disappointing one, for it only terminated in the establishment of a crushing and intrusive spiritual tyranny, embracing all the pretensions, but carrying with it none of the antiquity and historic glory which cast a halo round Papal Supremacy. Verily, as we view Darby's early teaching and action, and contrast them with his latest days, we read in them a new illustration of the words of the wise man: ‘The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.’⁹⁶

This very last sentence above may have said it all in just one short sentence: “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be—and that which is done, is that which shall be done—and there is no new thing under the sun.” Our brother Darby started his life in a hierarchical structure of Churches in union as a priest in the Church of England and Ireland. He then left that Church claiming it was in ruins. But after many years of service, he returned, not to that Church itself, but to the mindset

⁹⁶ The Church of England Pulpit, and Ecclesiastical Review, Volume XV (Church of England Pulpit Office, London, 1883) pg. 144

of that Church that affirmed a hierarchical structure of authority between Churches.

He began in a hierarchical structure of authority of Churches with Canterbury (and York) at the top, and he ended his life in a hierarchical structure of Churches with London as its top. He never returned to those practices and doctrinal requirements of the Anglican Communion, but he did return to the hierarchical mindset of the Anglican Communion. With the Church of England and Ireland—Canterbury was the ultimate authority. With our brother Darby and those Assemblies with him—London, and the London Central Meeting, was the ultimate authority. And just as Canterbury controlled the direction of the Churches under them, so London controlled the direction of the Assemblies under them.

Beloved, this seems to be why the Lord wisely ordained that each Assembly be completely autonomous from one another, but still be in fellowship with each other. This Scriptural autonomy keeps the religious and soulical nature of men in check (even that of good Christian men). The Lord, knowing there was and still would be men who love to exercise authority over others, gave us this warning in Matt. 20: 25-27.

Matthew 20:25-27 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave. NKJV

We see in verse 27 that our Lord disallows any such elevation of one man over others. This is our Lord’s solution to this innate desire in man. This becomes all the more clear in the Greek. Literally, the verse could be translated, “And if anyone desires to be first among you, **he must be a slave.**” The Holy Spirit uses the verb “to be” in the imperative mood (ἔστω), which is a mood of command in Greek, to convey the meaning of our Lord’s word in this passage.

Our Lord is saying even the “desiring” to “lord” it over others becomes a disqualifier. Thus, since He well knew the soulical and religious desire of men to exercise authority and to impose their views and will over others, He says that if one even entertains such a desire in his heart beyond that of a fleeting thought, he immediately becomes disqualified and “must” (this is the imperative mood of command), he “must” become a slave. And why did He say a slave?—because a slave is one who has no authority over others at all. Obviously, one who is first or chief among

others is the one who makes decisions, whereas a slave is the complete opposite. A slave does not make decision or have any authority over the ones to whom he is a slave; but, rather, he is the one who must submit.

Consequently, when men try to impose their will on others (the key word is “impose”) they disqualify themselves from ever being a leader over others. If this command, alone, of our Master, had been honored there never would have been half the heartache that came upon the Church. If this desire of our Lord was honored by all, there never could have been a “Pope,” or a diocesan Bishop, or an “Archbishop.” Nor could there ever be one like J. N. Darby, who would most certainly refuse such titles, or any title like those, but who, nevertheless, still exercised the type of authority that was behind such titles. He exercised an authority that demanded submission, and an authority that sought to “impose” his viewpoints and his will upon other leading brothers in London, and through the London Central Meeting, upon other Christian elders and upon other Christian Assemblies.

So, once we realize all this, we are left with the Biblical model, wherein each Assembly respects another Assembly, wherein each Assembly minds their own business, and wherein, if another Assembly is asked for counsel, they will humbly offer their suggestion, without any censure if their counsel is not taken. It becomes a fellowship of equals and not a fellowship of hierarchical Assemblies, where such hierarchical structure is always denied (but is always firmly maintained). And, in those cases, when another Assembly falls away and allows evil to remain in their midst (in the judgment of another Assembly) those other Assemblies would pray for them and ask the Chief Shepherd to discipline His local flock and restore the purity the Good Shepherd so desires.

Why is this so hard to do? I am afraid the real reason this is not done is because many do not really believe the Lord actively shepherds and disciplines His Assemblies. They might confess belief with their lips, but with their actions they deny it. As we mentioned, in the previous chapter, what if the Lord allows an Assembly to continue on without any discipline for many months? Is that not His prerogative? Why do we think we know better than He, as to when, where and what discipline is necessary? During the Old Testament, as we mentioned, He was longsuffering sometimes for long period of time, awaiting their repentance.

What would have happened if our brother Darby and others would have committed to the Lord what they perceived as a problem with Bethesda

and waited for Him to directly discipline the Assembly, thus leaving Bethesda alone? Perhaps, the issue would have been resolved in the Lord's timing and peace would have continued among the brethren and division would have been averted.

If J. N. Darby had faith in the shepherding of the Saviour, he would never have excommunicated entire Assemblies, but rather would have minded his own business within the one Assembly he was a part of and would have exercised his discernment among the saints with whom he was in fellowship in the receiving or refusing anyone that came to them for fellowship from the Assembly with which they were waiting for the Lord to deal with.

We acknowledge that because he felt so strongly on certain issues he would have still sought to guard the Assembly that he was in, and keep them free from the errors which he perceived to exist in Bethesda and in other Assemblies, but in doing so he could have left Bethesda and other Assemblies, who did not agree with him, alone, entrusting them to the Saviour. Conversely, if Bethesda and/or other Assemblies thought the Assembly in London was going too far, and/or was being legalistic, they could have equally entrusted them to the Lord and awaited the Lord's judgment on those issues and so minded their own business (which Bethesda did try to do). And that was their liberty in Christ Jesus to do so. But such a mindset takes patience and faith. That does not mean each Assembly could not make their viewpoint known, and exercise discipline within their own gathering. But it does mean that they would not try to force their viewpoint on others with threats of excommunication and censure. Such discipline as that of one Assembly over another belongs to the Lord.

Nowhere does Scripture allow one Assembly to excommunicate another Assembly as was practiced by J. N. Darby and the one Church in London. This was a man-made tradition he started, by which he ignored and invalidated the very Word of God he claimed to obey. As such, it is nothing but presumption and sin for one individual, or one group of individuals of one Assembly, whether elders or leading brothers, to ignore and/or to disallow another Assembly's decisions regarding matters that are within their own oversight. If they make a mistake in judgment, those others Assemblies should have faith and trust that the Lord Jesus Christ will discharge His responsibility as Chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls to resolve the issue.

Consequently, each Assembly could still see the other Assembly as brethren redeemed by the Lord, still having the imputed righteousness of Christ, but, in their mind, making an error in judgment. They could still see them as covered by the blood of Christ, and so, still under the care and discipline of the Lord, knowing that the Lord will chasten those whom He loves. They could still give them a greeting and wish them well in the Lord. And this brings us to our last point.

3) Scripture provides us examples to follow in regard to our practice of fellowship with other Assemblies, all within the purview of the unity of the Spirit.

To help us understand this principle of mutual respect, fellowship and acknowledgment of the rightful authority of the Lord Jesus to discipline and chasten each Assembly at the time of His choosing and wisdom, let us consider, first of all, the evil that was present in Corinth, which, in some cases, was an evil so much greater than that which some believed plagued Bethesda, and most certainly greater than that of Sheffield. Then let us compare how our brother Darby dealt with evil in an Assembly and how Paul dealt with evil in an Assembly. First let us consider Corinth.

Were there not many saints in the Assembly in Corinth that were carnal? Indeed, there were.

I Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, **but as unto carnal**, *even* as unto babes in Christ. KJV

Were they not filled with the worst evil of all—pride? Most assuredly.

I Corinthians 4:7 For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, **why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?** KJV

Proverbs 6:16-19 These *six things* doth the LORD hate: yea, *seven are an abomination unto him*: ¹⁷ A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹ A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Were they not possessed with the evil of greed? Yes, in light of their practices they were.

I Corinthians 6:1, 7-8 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? ⁷ Now **therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another.** Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves to be defrauded*? ⁸ On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that *your* brethren. KJV & NASB

Were not some of the saints, apparently, taking part in the idolatrous worship of pagans? Yes, and that is why Paul warns them.

I Corinthians 10:21-22 Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, **and the cup of devils:** ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, **and of the table of devils.** ²² Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? KJV

Were they not holding to the evil of class distinctions, and ignoring the poor? Most certainly! This too, is a grave sin and terrible evil.

I Corinthians 11:17-32 Now in this that I declare *unto you* I praise *you* not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. ¹⁸ For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. ¹⁹ For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. ²⁰ When ye come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's supper. ²¹ **For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.** ²² What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? **or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.** ²⁷ Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. ²⁹ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ **For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.** ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. KJV

Deuteronomy 15:7-9 If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: ⁸ But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, *in that* which he wanteth. ⁹ Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; **and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee.** KJV

1 John 3:17 But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? NASB

For much less evil than this, our brother Darby, and those with him, excommunicated the Assembly in Sheffield! Consequently, since the evil in Corinth was so much greater than Sheffield (not even counting the evil I Cor. 5), if Darby and those with him were really walking in truth and so were being consistent, they would have certainly required the excommunication of the entire Assembly in Corinth, and even anyone from that Assembly who went to another place who, while not being guilty of those things, nevertheless decided to remain in contact and fellowship with that Assembly in Corinth, as well as the Assembly that received that brother, and any Assemblies that agreed with that Assembly! Most assuredly, they would have to do this because of their theory of separation from evil being the only basis of maintaining, what they viewed as a visible unity of the Spirit.

But see how Scripture shows the opposite; it shows that the Churches in Asia, along with the apostle Paul, had a completely different mindset than that of our brother Darby. The Apostle Paul did not excommunicate Corinth for the continuing presence of such evil, nor did the Church in Ephesus in Asia refuse fellowship to anyone from that Assembly. They received Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus from that Assembly (I Cor. 16:17) even though it seems Paul already knew that evil existed in that Church and that those three brothers did not choose to leave that Assembly, and separate from the evil in that Assembly (cf. I Cor. 1:11-12; 3:1; 11:17). Rather, they all gave the Church in Corinth a greeting as brethren in the Lord, and in the case with Aquila and Prisca they also gave them a hearty greeting!

I Corinthians 16:19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. NASB

Also, on more than one occasion our brother Darby said he would not go to an Assembly he deemed was not separated from evil. In regard to Bethesda he once said, "For my own part I should neither go to Bethesda in its *present state*, nor while in that state go where persons from it were knowingly admitted. I do not wish to reason on it here, but lay it before brethren, and press it on their *fidelity to Christ* and their care of His beloved saints."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Volume 15* (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames, 1964) pg. 257

How different that was to the attitude of Paul, who, knowing that evil still existed at Corinth, being left unjudged II Cor. 12:21, even after they judged the one evil in I Cor. 5, he was still willing to go to Corinth in their *present state*. He even pleaded with them to “receive” him and those with him, when he came!

II Cor. 7: 2-3 Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. ³ I speak not *this* to condemn *you*: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with *you*. NASB

Paul did not believe that somehow he was being disloyal to the Lord Jesus Christ by such a practice, or that he would have betrayed his *fidelity to Christ*, as our brother Darby felt as quoted above. I am afraid our brother Darby, in his zeal for the Lord (which is good thing) forgot the mercy, love, and imputed righteousness of the Lord (which forgetfulness is a bad thing).

Or, let’s go beyond the practice of the apostle Paul; let us consider the practice of our Lord. After a few months in Plymouth our brother Darby stated he must not have anything to do with that Assembly because in his mind they allowed evil to remain unjudged. And yet, did our Lord act that way when He knew about the evil of Judas Iscariot in the midst of His circle of fellowship? Did the existence of such evil in Judas demand His departure from His other eleven apostles, or did our Lord demand they depart from Judas? Did the evil leaven of Judas, leaven the loaf that was the other eleven disciples? For three years our Lord was longsuffering with Judas and the evil of his ways, allowing him to remain in his circle of fellowship. He ate with him and allowed him to eat with them, inviting him to partake of the Passover feast, even though he was aware that there was much evil in him. Such is the graciousness and longsuffering of our Lord.

What would have happened if our brother Darby imitated our Lord’s graciousness and patience, and, as such, was longsuffering for three years with Bethesda, awaiting the time which inevitably comes, when evil is exposed and judged by God through chastisement (that is, looking at it from our brother Darby’s point of view that it was really Bethesda that was practicing the evil)?

Or, let’s consider the apostle John, when he heard of the evil being left unjudged in the Church wherein Gaius fellowshiped. Did he withhold his greetings from him, even though he remained and was a part of an Assembly, which was filled with the evil ways of Diotrephes? Did he not

still give Gaius his greetings as a fellow believer in the Lord? Did he ever advise him to leave the Assembly? No, John respected Gaius' decision to remain in that Assembly even though it was an Assembly with evil in its midst, i.e. the evil being practiced by Diotrephes. And not only that, John still gave him his greeting and his farewell of peace.

III John 1:14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. **Peace be to you.** The friends **greet you.** Greet the friends by name. NASB

And, yet, John was the very one who wrote the following: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds (II John 1:10-11). So, obviously, John did not consider the evil in that Assembly, to be that type of evil which required one to withhold a greeting and/or Godspeed!

But in Darby's mind that verse should apply to all evil in the Assembly which is not separated from, for he applied it to what he considered to be the evil of Sheffield, which was simply receiving someone who came from an Assembly, which changed its meeting place without fellowshiping first with Darby and the other brethren with him!

This shows that many brethren take this verse out of context, stretching it to say something it does not say. According to our brother Darby, fellowshiping with one who remains in an Assembly where evil is allowed to exist, even if the one with whom you are fellowshiping does not condone the evil itself, makes no difference, for such a one is participating in the evil deeds of the other, simply by not leaving the Assembly. Thus, in his mind, the one who greets such a one is condemned himself. (We will discuss later how this verse is misused.) Consequently, with this mindset, the apostle John would have fallen under the censure of our brother Darby by his giving a greeting to one who decided to remain in an Assembly, wherein was Diotrephes.

The apostles of our Lord never practiced the teaching espoused by our brother Darby. Our brother excommunicated whole Assemblies for disagreeing with him and the other brothers in the London Central Meeting. The Bethesda Assembly was excluded by our brother Darby and those brethren with him, for allowing those in their midst, who, in their mind, did not sufficiently condemn the false teaching of B. W. Newton. Thus, in their mind they were participating in his evil deeds. As such, according to our brother Darby, one should not even give a

greeting to anyone in the Bethesda Assembly, or any other Assemblies remaining in fellowship with them, as they were not separating from evil.

Yet, let's look at the practice of Paul again, of whom, the Holy Spirit commands us to imitate. Even after the Church in Corinth dealt with the evil of the brother in a sinful relationship with his father's wife, they still had much evil left unjudged in their midst, as we briefly mentioned above. Paul states this in II Cor. 12:20-21.

II Corinthians 12:20-21 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there may be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; ²¹ I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past **and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.** NASB

So even though they had dealt with the one evil of I Cor. 5, there still was much evil from which they had not yet separated, even after Paul stated they must not associate with a so-called brother who is immoral, covetous, etc., in his first epistle.

I Corinthians 5:11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. NASB

They knew Paul's mind about it, for they put out that one evil person, but they did not put out the others that Paul knew about. He clearly states that there were still those in the Church who had not "repented of their impurity" and "immorality" in II Cor. 12:21.

Not only that, he also states that they were allowing heresy to be taught in their midst, even though, they were not yet embracing that heresy themselves. Apparently, they were boasting of their broad-mindedness and liberal attitudes toward the viewpoints of others, even allowing strange teaching to be taught in their midst, even that teaching that was heretical regarding the nature of Jesus.

II Corinthians 11:3-4, 12-15, 19-20 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. ⁴ **For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted-- you may well put up with it!** ¹² But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may

cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.¹³ For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.¹⁵ Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.¹⁹ **For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!**²⁰ For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours *you*, if one takes *from you*, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. NKJV

And, yet we see that Paul, and the saints with him, still gave the Church in Corinth a greeting and farewell in the Lord, as John did to Gaius and to those with him in the Church in which Diotrephes presided.

With Paul, we can see both his greeting and his farewell in II Cor. 1:1-2 and 13:11-14.

II Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: ² Grace *be* to you and peace from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

II Corinthians 13:11-14 Finally, **brethren, farewell.** Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.¹² Greet one another with an holy kiss.¹³ All the saints salute you.¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen. KJV

It is important to note that he gave the greeting and farewell to the saints, to the brethren, i.e. to those believers in Christ in Corinth, not to those who taught heresy. Even though those in Corinth were disobeying the principle of the Holy Spirit that John recorded for us in his second epistle regarding those Christians who were grieving the Holy Spirit by tolerating those who were teaching heresy because of their supposed liberalness and broad-mindedness (without every embracing the heresy themselves), he did not order them excommunicated because through their broad-mindedness and association they were making themselves partakers of their evil deed. Why?—because carnal toleration and false association did not constitute a sin requiring excommunication, otherwise, Paul would not have given them a greeting as he did under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Those who were practicing heresy needed to be rejected and excommunicated with no greeting or farewell ever given to them, but that was not the case with those who were free from the heresy, but still wrongly in association with them. (However, we will

see later in book two that such carnal association was very dangerous and could, indeed, lead into a situation where they would also need to be excommunicated. But we will examine that in the next book under Church Discipline.)

And yet, according to our brother Darby, Paul should never have given them a greeting or farewell, for he knew that such evil was being allowed to exist in the Assembly in Corinth, even such evil as allowing false teaching. Yet, Paul did not follow the thinking and practice of our brother Darby. Why?—because Paul did not see “separation from evil” as a basis for the unity of the Spirit, but as a matter of discipline with certain prescribed procedures and requirements which would occur if not by those within the Church, then most assuredly by the LORD Jesus Christ. Paul knew he could still teach the truth to them and show them the error and danger of being so liberal and broad-minded that they would allow strange things to be taught. He knew that in many cases it was not that they held to the teaching, but they allowed it out of a condescending mindset of enlightenment and toleration, which Paul knew was nothing more than the carnal and childish ways of a babe in Christ. As such a babe did not need to be cast out of the house, but rather, be disciplined and brought to a place of spiritual growth. (Of course, Paul would have instructed them to reject those who taught such heresy, just as John did, and for any in the Church that might succumb to that false teaching, holding to it themselves, Paul would direct the Church to reject them as well after the first and second warning—Titus 3:10-11).

Paul was able to do this because he did not see separation from evil as the basis of Christian unity, but rather, he still saw every believer with the righteousness of Christ (I Cor. 1:30). Thus, he could still receive them as brethren in the Lord—a most carnal Church, yes, but an excommunicated Church, no.

Of course, the apostle John, who believed the same thing, could also give a greeting to the Church in Thyatira, with all its evil still left unjudged.

Revelation 1:4-5, 10-11 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: **Grace be unto you**, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;⁵ And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,¹¹ Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the

last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, **and unto Thyatira**, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. KJV

Revelation 2:20 ‘But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. NASB

And this was the same John, who wrote II John 1:9-10! And yet, John still gave a greeting of grace and peace to that Church in Thyatira, in his greeting in Rev. 1:4, under the command of the Holy Spirit. Obviously, John did not think his greeting meant he was participating in their evil, even though he wrote the following:

II John 1:11 for he who greets him partakes in his wicked works. (Darby’s Version)

The imputed righteousness of Christ is what allows us to remain in fellowship with such carnal Churches. Indeed, without the imputed righteousness of Christ, every member of every Church would have to be excommunicated, for God is holy and can abide no evil. If not for the blood of Christ and the righteousness of Christ, God would have to cast us all out from His presence, including our brother Darby and those with him in London, for the only Christian who can claim to have no evil in their life or in their thoughts (even if but a fleeting thought) is one who does not sin, and the Holy Spirit says there is not one Christian on this earth who can claim such a thing, and if one does, that claim is a sin in and of itself (I John 1:7-10)! (One day we will be able to claim such a thing, but not now before we are glorified.) But, because of the blood of Christ our Father in heaven is longsuffering, full of love and full of patient understanding, which He also expects to be true of all His children. If one of His children is not, they are self-righteous and lacking in mercy. Remember the parable of the king and the ungrateful servant, whom the king forgave much, yet in turn was not willing to even forgive a little (Matt. 18:23-35).

John, the apostle, was not like that ungrateful servant in the parable, though it seems that at one time he was, thus earning the name son of thunder (Luke 9:52-56; Mark 3:17). John saw those Christians in Thyatira as those redeemed of the Lord who had fallen into the evil of allowing an excommunicable evil a place in the Assembly. He saw them, despite their sin, as ones received and loved by the Lord, and so he, in

turn, loved them and greeted them in the Lord. John did not excuse their evil; he did not condone their evil; in fact, he knew the Lord would judge their evil; he knew the Lord chastens those whom he loves. But, if the truth be told, this verse is often taken out of context and misapplied, as we mentioned before—otherwise, John would never have given his greeting, or at the minimum protested when the Lord asked him to do something he saw as wrong, just as Peter protested at first when he was asked to do what he thought as wrong (Acts 10:13-14).

This in itself shows that John did not interpret II John 1:10-11 the way our brother Darby interpreted it, by applying the ban of not even giving a greeting to those who were not guilty of the evil, but were partakers of the evil by their remaining in fellowship in which the evil existed. As we said, we will examine it later, but we are referring to this verse as it was commonly understood by those who followed our brother Darby.

So, who should we imitate— the apostles John and Paul, or should we imitate our brother Darby?

Thus we can see that the unity of the Spirit in our fellowship with each other must be governed by patience, love, and most importantly a humility that recognizes the “unworthiness” of our own righteousness and the utter “worthiness” of the righteousness of Christ imputed to each and every believer by the blood of Christ. Wholesale excommunication of Assemblies based upon authoritarian mindsets breaks the fellowship of the Spirit and ignores the bond of peace between Christians, even Christians who are in need of much discipline by the Lord, as we will now examine in the next section on Church Discipline. Amen.

BOOK TWO

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE

There are many verses regarding discipline within the Body of Christ (see Fig. 3). Discipline is necessary because the Church is a Holy Temple in the Lord, a habitation of God through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). As such, the Church of God should never be despised, belittled, or allowed to be held in contempt by any who names the name of Christ.⁹⁸

I Corinthians 11:22 What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? **or despise ye the church of God**, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not. KJV

The Church should always be respected and honoured. It should never be allowed to become corrupted or to fall in to disrepair (so to speak) by the willful disregard or neglect of Christians. Paul said it this way in regard to the Church in Corinth.

II Corinthians 11:2-3 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as a chaste virgin to Christ*.³ But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be **corrupted** from the simplicity that is in Christ.

But what is forgotten by many is that our Lord has the same mindset. Or, better, Paul had the same mindset as our Lord.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,²⁷ **That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.**

The reason Paul felt the way about the Church the way he did, is because the Lord felt that way.

⁹⁸ This Greek word translated “despise” (καταφρονεῖτε) in I Cor. 11:22, in the KJV, carries these additional nuances of “belittling,” or “allowing to be held in contempt,” as well as “to disregard” and/or “to neglect.” The compound word could also be understood with the sense of to “think down upon,” or “to have low thoughts about.”

Fig. 1—Summary Chart of Disciplinary Verses in Scripture

Passage of Scripture	Judgment Rendered	Type of Sins	Excommunication From Assembly
I Cor. 5: 11-13 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within <i>the church</i> ? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. NASB	Do not eat or associate with such a one. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves	Societal Sins	Yes
II John 1:9-11 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹ for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” KJV	Do not receive him into your house nor bid him Godspeed	Doctrinal Sins	Yes
Matt 18:15-17 And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ “But if he does not listen <i>to you</i> , take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷ “And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. NASB	Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer	Personal Sins	Possible (if it leads to further sin)
Titus 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; KJV	Reject after two warnings	Heretical Sins	Yes
Rom. 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. NASB	Keep your eye on, and turn away from them	Party Sins	Very Possible (could end up in excommunication)
I Timothy 6:3, 5a If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, <i>even</i> the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness...from such withdraw thyself. KJV	Withdraw	Self-serving Sins	Very Possible (could end up in excommunication)
II Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. KJV	From such turn away.	Apostasy	Yes
II Thess. 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. NASB	Take special note	Prideful Sins	No
II Thess. 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. KJV	Withdraw from	Disorderly Sins	No

So what we see here is that the purpose for any Church discipline is so that the purity of the Church as a Bride and as a Temple might be maintained. But, equally, we must see that this is accomplished not just by man, but also by God. There is a form of discipline that believers must practice, and a form of discipline that only the Lord can do. The problem arises when Christians presume they can also exercise the discipline which belongs solely to the Lord. The apostle Paul sought to present the Church in purity by maintaining discipline, along with the elders in the Church, with the authority given to him as an apostle of Christ and to the elders as bishops in the Church (Acts 20:28-29; II Cor. 13:10 NKJV). But he was very careful to never usurp the discipline that belonged to the Lord (II Cor. 1:24NASB). The Lord, Himself, will shepherd and discipline His flock, so as to present the Church to Himself in all her glory (Eph. 5:26; Heb. 12:5-11).

The problem with our brother Darby's viewpoint regarding discipline is that he crossed over and usurped the discipline that solely belonged to the LORD Jesus Christ. He misapplied verses regarding discipline, taking them out of their context and viewed fellow believers through the eyes of man and not the eyes of God. Because of this failure to distinguish between the discipline allowed to man and the discipline left solely in the hands of God, he developed a misplaced zeal for the Lord. Our brother Darby, indeed, had a zeal for God, but he exceeded the measure of discipline that was allowed to man, and so was short on grace; whereas our Lord, because of His precious blood that was shed for us, manifested a true zeal for God, according to knowledge, love, mercy, and grace, without ever sacrificing the purity and holiness of God.

When our brother Darby looked at assemblies, it seemed he first saw wrong-doing, and not the blood of Christ which washed them clean. When God looks at assemblies He first sees the blood of His Beloved Son, and only then the wrong-doing in need of correction. Our brother Darby would first see the evil, and only then, if at all, see the imputed righteousness of Christ within his brethren (along with all its ramifications). God, on the other hand, would always see first the righteousness of His Son, then their need of sanctification because of the evil and unrighteousness still in their hearts, as well as their need of discipline, because of the evil in their midst.

Or to put it another way, our brother Darby would first see those with whom he disagreed, as misled or blinded brethren; whereas, our Father in heaven always sees first His children, and then children who have been

misled, or led astray. Our brother Darby would first address the faults of other assemblies, sometimes never giving any praise at all, but our Lord would always start out first with praise for each Assembly, and only then would address the faults in need of correction.⁹⁹

It was this misplaced zeal of our brother Darby that caused him to see the unity of the Spirit must be based upon separation from evil, whereas our Lord Jesus saw the unity of the Spirit as based, not upon one's ability to separate from real or supposed evil, but rather based upon His righteousness in us that is ours by His blood and the glory of His life.

One of the early brothers of that circle of brethren, first meeting together in the name of the Lord in Dublin, saw this in our brother Darby. He once wrote the following to him regarding the direction his misplaced zeal would lead him and those with him.

“As such, they will tend to have little pity and sympathy for those Christians within those same man-made religious systems. Moreover, when that lack of pity and sympathy is coupled together with the growing conviction within your midst, that fellowship, or union together, is based upon one's agreement in doctrine and opinion, rather than being based upon life and love, you will find yourself once again in a system governed by human authority and man-made opinion (even though that will never be admitted). **You will be known more by what you witness against, than what you witness for; and in the end, you will find yourself witnessing against everyone else but yourself.**”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ See the Book of Revelation, chapters two and three. For example, consider one of the worst examples of evil in an Assembly, the Assembly in Thyatira. Our Lord first says, “I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.” And then, after recognizing the good, does He bring up the evil. “But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols”—Rev. 2:19-20 NASB. The only exception is the Assembly in Laodicea that was so compromised that He had nothing to praise them about. Some may wish to add Sardis, but I believe our Lord is first recognizing some good by affirming that they are doing good works, but not with the perfection they should have. But even if we include Sardis, our Lord still begins with the good, five out of the seven times, which is a little over 71% of the time. This reveals the mind of Christ, which we are told to have in us

¹⁰⁰ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2014) pg. 7

“However, the moment we abandon this principle of receiving all who Christ receives because of our possession of the common life of Jesus, and rather, adopt a position of separating ourselves from other brethren, with a mindset that only preaches against their errors with words (that is, errors or doctrines that have nothing to do with the essential doctrines of the Faith), then, at that moment, every Christian, or every group of Christians, will become suspect. The first thought in our mind will become, “What needs to be set straight in our brother’s life, or what false interpretation needs to be corrected.” No longer will it be enough to examine whether or not they are Christians, rather a standard will be set up where all their conduct and principles will first have to be examined and approved before they can be received. This mindset will inevitably lead to the most bigoted and narrow-minded in our midst becoming the judges of all. Why? Because it’s not in the nature of a bigoted and narrow-minded conscience to yield. Thus, those among us with an open and enlarged heart will find themselves forced to yield to the strictures of narrow-minded consciences.”¹⁰¹

So, it is very important to recognize that true zeal, patterned after the Lord’s zeal, will always seek to first recognize the good and the eternal work of Christ in the hearts of fellow believers before dealing with the evil things in a heart in need of sanctification. A true zeal will “...examine everything carefully,” [and then], “hold fast to that which is good,” all the while condemning any evil that might be found (cf. I Thess. 5:21 NASB), whereas, a misplaced zeal will “...examine everything carefully,” [and then], upon the discovery of some type of evil, separate from them, all the while ignoring the good. The former is a completely different mindset, a mindset our brother Darby first possessed, but then later abandoned.

Moreover a true zeal will recognize that God does not delegate complete discipline to the Church, and/or to individual leaders. There are, indeed, certain forms of discipline that are meant to be faithfully discharged by the Church, but then there are certain judgments or disciplines that are reserved solely to the Lord. Failure to distinguish between these two will always lead to an evil in and of itself—the sin of presumption and usurpation of our Lord’s rightful authority.

Darby sought to keep the Assemblies free from the evil he saw in other Assemblies—which is a very “noble” mindset. But by his practice of discipline reserved only to the Lord, he introduced evil into the very Assembly he sought to keep pure—which is a very “ignoble” mindset. (Of course, as we said earlier in this volume, every Assembly has some

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pg. 11-12

type of evil within their midst as long human beings are in their midst, for until we are fully sanctified and glorified, in God's eyes—apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ—we all will fall short of His glory and holiness, being but sinners saved by grace).

In this light, let us first examine the primary Scripture having to do with discipline and excommunication—I Cor. 5: 1-13. Then we will examine the main verse that led to our brother Darby's sin of presumption and usurpation of the authority of the Lord, which was his misuse and misinterpretation of II John 1:9-11. Next we will examine the other main portion of Scripture dealing with Church discipline which our brother also misinterpreted to justify his actions—Matt. 18: 15-35. And then, finally, we will examine those other portions of Scripture dealing with other types of discipline that the Lord Jesus has delegated to the Church.

Societal Sins—I Corinthians 5:1-13

I Corinthians 5:1-13 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. ² And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. ³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of *dough*? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ *I did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

In this portion of Scripture we are given the process, whereby one is excommunicated from the Church. It begins with the sin involved, and ends with the removal of the wicked one from the Assembly. In between the two we are presented with the process, i.e. the reason why this discipline must be exercised, and then the various other sins that require the same such expulsion, as we will now see.

The process begins with an apostle exercising the spiritual authority given to him by the Lord. Paul is not exercising a formal authority over the Church, but a spiritual authority. We spoke of this in volume one, which the reader can revisit if they wish. But for the purposes of understanding the process involved in this text we will include some of that which we wrote in volume one.

The spiritual authority of the apostles of Christ in the New Testament was real and they exercised it when needed. And it seems the most severe expression of that spiritual authority was delivering a person to Satan; this seems to be a special authority given to apostles in those early days and to no one else. There is no indication given in Scripture that this authority was ever given to elders, or to the Church. This miraculous power was given to apostles and was, more than likely, one of the true signs of an apostle. It would be presumptuous to pretend to have this authority today. Only those early apostles had the authority from God to deliver the person to Satan as can be seen in I Cor. 5:3-5 (also cf. Luke 22:31-32; I Tim. 1:20). Let me provide the King James Version and the New King James Version.

I Cor. 5:3-5 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, 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, 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. KJV

I Cor. 5:3-5 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ **deliver such a one to Satan** for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. NKJV

It seems the New King James translation might be a little misleading by their use of a period at the end of verse 3. (It should be noted that the original Greek did not use punctuation marks as we do in English. Therefore, there can sometimes be legitimate alternatives to an English version's choice of punctuation). I believe the King James Version is more accurate with their use of the comma. The controlling verb in the text is the verb κέκρικα (judged) in verse 3. It is a 1st person singular perfect verb, showing that it is only Paul that is making the judgment to deliver such a one to Satan, not the Assembly; indeed, by the use of the perfect, he is showing he had already made the decision. As far as the word translated "deliver" in the New King James Version in verse 5, it is an infinitive and not a second person plural verb as suggested by the New King James translation. Therefore, I believe it would be better to translate the verbal infinitive as "to deliver," in order to complete the periphrastic thought with the main verb, which I take as being κέκρικα, "I have decided (judged)," in verse 3.

Therefore, I believe the idea in the Greek is “I have decided to deliver.” That is the decision Paul had already made. He is not saying to the Assembly, “Deliver such a one, etc.” as the New King James version has it. He is saying he has decided “to deliver” such a one, etc. The King James Version rightly shows this, and even the New American Standard clarifies this point by adding the main verb “I have decided” again to verse 5 in italics.

I would render the verse as follows—

For I, indeed, as being absent by the body, but present by the Spirit, already **have**, as if I was present, **judged the one doing** this thing **as follows** (when in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ you have been gathered together, you and my spirit together with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ): to deliver such a one to Satan unto the destruction of the flesh, in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.

In this sense, τὸν κατεργασάμενον (“the one doing,” or in KJV, “done this deed”) is construed with κέκρικα (I have judged), and οὕτως (“thus,” or “as follows”) is construed with κέκρικα (I have judged), rather than being construed with κατεργασάμενον (the one doing). The judgment made by Paul was “to deliver such a one to Satan.” But it would be made known in a public Assembly gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The adverb οὕτως (thus, or as follows) introduces this decision (similar to its usage in Matt. 6:9 and Luke 19:31). With this sense, the phrase ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ (in the name of our Lord Jesus) is being construed, not with κέκρικα (I have judged), but with the participle συναχθέντων (when you have been gathered).

Here is another way it might be rendered into English with the last part of verse 3 being parenthetical, as well as verse 4 being rendered parenthetical in order to lay out the venue in which the pronouncement will be made.

For I, indeed, as being absent by the body, but present by the Spirit, already have (as if I was present) decided as follows (*concerning* the one doing this thing)—to deliver such a one to Satan unto the destruction of the flesh (when, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have been gathered together, you and my spirit together with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ) in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord

It is as if Paul is comparing the proceedings to a court of law, where a verdict is made known once the court is in session. The spiritual

judgment is Paul's, but the carrying out of that judgment is left up to the Assembly. They were still admonished, based upon Paul's judgment, to remove the wicked one from their midst. Therefore, he exhorts them to do so in an Assembly gathered in the name of the Lord, as that was the proper venue in which his judgment should be made known and the wicked person should be removed from their midst (I Cor. 5:13).

This exacting judgment of Paul with its detailed instructions on how to carry it out seems to be Paul's way of chastising them for not removing the sinning Christian themselves before Paul even had to get involved. He reminds them that they are responsible for judging those within the Church based upon the instructions Paul had left them in verse 11 and 12.

But, because, they did not follow those instructions, which in turn caused a leavening to already begin, he had to make an immediate and drastic judgment that only an apostle could make. The seriousness of their lapse of judgment and the darkness of their moral understanding required that Paul, an apostle of Christ, needed to deliver the sinning Christian to Satan. But that is all an apostle could do. He could not force them to follow his advice and remove the wicked man from the Assembly, keeping no company with him, nor even eating with him. If they refused, it was up to the Lord to handle the situation as the Chief Shepherd. There was no way for Paul as an apostle to enforce his decision as an earthly king might do. This was according to the wisdom and guidance of God. Men need to learn that our Lord is not a mere figurehead in the Church. He takes care of those things he has not delegated to us to do. The final arbitrator in discipline is the Lord himself when Christians and/or Churches fail to do so. He intended it that way, for it teaches us to trust in His presence and forces us to deal with Him personally.

Before we turn to the reason why Paul says this is necessary, we should note that just because the spiritual authority of delivering one to Satan was an apostolic prerogative granted to those early apostles of Christ and not to the Church, it does not mean the Church has no authority from God to remove a wicked man from their midst. Delivering one to Satan is not the same as removal or excommunication. This fact is demonstrated by the fact that Paul decided to deliver this offending brother in Corinth to Satan before the Church ever removed him, and that remained a fact, whether the Church followed through on removing him or not. This is confirmed in Scripture because the Greek word κέκρικα (I have judged) is in the perfect tense, indicating that it was a past act with present

results. In other words, the brother would still be delivered to Satan, whether the Assembly subsequently removed him or not! Thus the two acts are not the same.

The Church does not have the power to deliver one to Satan. That was a disciplinary act unique to an Apostle of Christ in the beginning of the Church dispensation as a foundational revelation of the sanctity of God's Temple, i.e. the Church.

The Church, on the other hand, has been given the disciplinary act of excommunication. The two should never be confused. The apostle had a special authority and power granted to them during those early days of Church that was never intended for the Church. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is another example of this special power, albeit in a more drastic manner than just delivering one to Satan (Acts 5:1-12). This power or authority of Paul to deliver one to Satan was specifically for the destruction of their flesh that their spirit may be saved, and was one of the signs of a true Apostle in those days (I Cor. 5:5; I Tim. 1:20; also see II Cor. 12:12). The Church was never given such power.

Next, Paul gives the reason in verses 6-8 as to why the Assembly needed to remove the sinning brother. He says that a little leaven will leaven the whole loaf, and that as an Assembly we should celebrate the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. These are important verses for they have been misapplied by some.

Paul's desire is that the Church in Corinth would be a new lump. A new lump is dough that has no leaven in it at all. And yet, if we look closely at verse 7, we see that Paul states that even though leaven was present (which means they could not be considered a new lump) they still were considered unleavened! How could that be?

I Corinthians 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: KJV

The answer is that Paul says is that the introduction of a little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump. He does not say a little leaven has leavened the whole lump. The Greek verb Paul uses is in the present tense, meaning that the leavening process is ongoing, which means it could be translated this way: "Are you not aware that a little leaven is leavening the whole lump?"

Consequently, when Paul commands the Assembly to purge out the leaven so they could be a new lump (meaning a lump without any of that leaven of wickedness that is mentioned in I Cor. 5:11), it does not mean that they are no longer considered as being unleavened until they do! They are; but they are forewarned that the leaving process has begun. This meant that most of the Christians in Corinth, despite all their carnality, despite their sin of association brought about by their false tolerations, were still considered unleavened bread by Paul, because it was the sinning brother living in that sin that was leaven, not themselves. But they certainly could not be considered a new lump, for a new lump is free from any leaven anywhere, whereas they, being unleavened, had allowed some leaven to remain in their midst, which would eventually affect them.

Now some conclude that because they are not a new lump, because they have allowed some leaven to be present in the Assembly, they must be refused fellowship, and they all, the entire Assembly, must be considered to be excommunicated. But why would some conclude that? Paul never said that because an Assembly is not a new lump, that precludes fellowship. To make that a standard for fellowship adds to Scripture and is an evil in itself, for it presumes something the Holy Spirit did not say. It makes a judgment, not made by the Lord, and thus disowns an Assembly that is still owned by the Lord! Those who do so are introducing the leaven that comes from the sin of adding to Scripture into their own Assembly, thus precluding themselves from being a new lump!

The fact is that just because Paul did not consider the Church in Corinth to be a new lump at the time of his writing, did not cause Paul to disown them until the time came that they repented. Their lack of action did not keep Paul from fellowshiping with them. This fact is also true with the Churches in Galatia. They could not be considered to be a new lump either, but that did not keep Paul from fellowshiping with them (Gal. 5:7-9). It did not cause Paul to disown them and consider them excommunicated.

And yet, our brother Darby's view was completely different (as well as those who countenanced his theory of wholesale excommunication). This is what he wrote about this portion of Scripture.

"His [Paul's] complaint was that there was sin, leaven,—not merely a sinner, but sin among them, and ignorant as yet of discipline, they had not grieved so as that God should have removed the evil-doer from their midst, and tells them to purge out the old leaven (not merely to put the person out, which was his practical

direction) that they might be a new lump as they were unleavened. They, acquiescing in the sin, were involved in it; they were viewed in Christ and their true standing as unleavened; but they were to put out the old leaven that they might be a new lump, that their actual condition and standing might agree, otherwise they, the assembly, was not a new lump... To use the title of our standing as a sanction for acquiescing in sin, in fact, in the assembly, saying it cannot be defiled, is a most evil and pestilential doctrine; and that persons in it not guilty of the sin in act, are clear, though they acquiesce in it, is a thoroughly wicked principle, and directly contrary to Scripture... **I cannot own an assembly which admits or acquiesces in sin**, which takes this ground, that sin does not defile it, to represent the body of Christ, or to be met in Christ's name. It is to make Christ acquiesce in the sin,—” a minister of sin,”—God forbid!”¹⁰²

“The whole question is, ‘Is the church of God to maintain the truth in unity?’ My experience of the opposite system in the States in all shapes has made me firmer than ever in the path of what is called exclusiveness—exclusion of false doctrine and false practice, in contrast with protecting and excusing it...I do not the least confine discipline to the Table; where persons deliberately take up the loose principle, I have nothing to say to them in divine things anywhere—could not say grace at table with them, and am of course blamed for exclusiveness.”¹⁰³

“The question is not whether they are logically in precisely the same position as the blasphemers, but whether their position justifies their not being received to communion. **They are not according to scripture “a new lump,”** if they acquiesce in evil in their midst, not clear of the committed sin. So jealous is the apostle as to the truth, **that a simple friendly adieu makes a man partaker of his evil deeds...**”¹⁰⁴

As one can see he completely disallows such an Assembly that is not a new lump. He will not even eat with any of them apart from the Assembly or give them a friendly adieu.

But we are commanded in Scripture to imitate Paul, not other Christian servants, and, contrary to our brother Darby, not being a new lump did not stop Paul from giving the Church in Corinth a friendly adieu (I Cor. 16:23). Why?—because, even though they were not a new lump, they were still unleavened. Paul specifically writes, “...just as you are in fact

¹⁰² J. N. Darby, “Discipline and Unity of the Assembly,” *The Present Truth and Original Christian Witness Revived*, Vol. XIII (R. Groombridge & Son, London, 1863) pg. 171

¹⁰³ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D.*, Vol. II, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 268-269

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pg. 267

unleavened.” Not being a new lump did not keep him from fellowshiping with them.

I would dare say, until we are all glorified that not many Churches can claim to be a new lump, although that must certainly remain the goal of every Assembly. To be a new lump must mean there is no leaven present at all, which means there is no known sin in the Assembly that is left undealt with. But as we are all in the process of sanctification we find that even in the New Testament there were not many Churches that could be considered a new lump. Even the Church in Jerusalem could not be considered to be a new lump for they allowed certain Christians to remain as men of high reputation in the Assembly who were holding false doctrine seeking to subjugate Paul and the Gentile Churches to their views. They were being carnal and evil for opposing the Gospel preached by the apostle Paul (Gal. 2:4-6). That certainly would be evidence of leaven in the Assembly that is not being dealt with, or, using the nomenclature of our brother Darby, we would say that is evidence of “an assembly which admits or acquiesces in sin.” Moreover, many in the Church were of the sect of the Pharisees, who, even though they were Christian, were yet legalistic and carnal (Acts 15:5-11). That would also be evidence of leaven in the Church.

As such, according to our brother Darby’s principles of discipline and separation from evil, he would never be able to own the Church in Jerusalem, and he would not even eat with Peter, James and John nor give them a friendly adieu. But Paul never acted in that way. He owned them as a Church (Acts 15:4), and he gave them a greeting (Acts 19:21; 21: 17-19).

Moreover, according to our brother Darby’s viewpoint, he could not even go to Jerusalem to meet with them, for all the same reasons he said he could not go to Bethesda because of Bethesda’s supposed acquiescent to sin.¹⁰⁵ And yet Paul had no problem going to the Church in Jerusalem and meet with them, knowing very well that they were being sinful by opposing God’s choice of Paul as an apostle and opposing Paul’s gospel that he preached (Acts 21: 15-17).

Thus, the Church in Jerusalem was not a new lump in Acts 15, and they still were not a new lump years later in Acts 21:18-25 for they still had Christians in the Assembly that opposed the Apostle Paul. But they were

¹⁰⁵ J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Volume 15* (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames, 1964) pg. 257

not excommunicated by Paul and disowned by other Assemblies for that and for not dealing with the leaven of false brethren in Acts 15. Nor, for that matter did Paul act in such a way, so as to require the Churches he founded to bow to his view, or be excommunicating themselves. They brothers in Jerusalem were still given a greeting and friendly adieu. They were never disowned by Paul or others, as they should have been, if brother Darby's theory of separation and discipline was correct.

To this list we could add some of the Assemblies in Rome, for they also opposed Paul, an apostle of Christ, which would be a sin and so be a form of leaven (Phil. 1:12-17). Of course, we know many of the Churches in Galatia, if not all, could never be considered to be a new lump at the time of Paul's epistle to them, because of the presence of leaven in their midst also (Gal.5:9).

Galatians 5:7-10 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? ⁸ This persuasion *cometh* not of him that calleth you.⁹ **A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.**¹⁰ I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. KJV

The Church of Ephesus could not be considered to be a new lump for they were filled with false teachers who they never should have allowed (I Tim. 1:3). The list could go on and on. Colossae had problems, Laodicea had problems. Those in Crete had problems. And then, finally, one of the most obvious examples was the Church in Thyatira, which had much leaven present because they allowed the woman Jezebel to teach (Rev.2:20). All these could not be considered new lumps, and, as such, according to our brother Darby's theory, would all have to be disowned! But Paul did not do that and John the apostle did not do that. So who should we imitate, Paul and John, or our brother Darby?

Perhaps, the only Assemblies that could be considered to be a new lump in the New Testament would have been Philippi, and then, at least at the time of John's writing, Smyrna and Philadelphia. And yet, none of these other Assemblies listed above were disowned or not given a greeting or a friendly adieu, neither by the Lord nor by His apostles.

You see, beloved, a new lump represents an Assembly that is spiritual, that has properly dealt with every known sin, but not every Assembly is spiritual, not now, nor in the New Testament. The truth of the matter is, usually, the opposite is true; most Assemblies are not new lumps; many times they are carnal or soulical, both now, and in the New Testament. But, whether one or the other, every Assembly is still unleavened, i.e.

unless they have let a little leaven, leaven the entire lump (but even Thyatira had not reached that condition, for there were still some who were faithful). Besides, positionally speaking we all are still unleavened, for being unleavened represents our standing in Christ, and our recognition of His righteousness and blood as being the sole basis of our unity and our fellowship with one another.

So we see that being a new lump should be the goal of every Assembly, and it represents those Churches who walk in the Spirit, by faith, in accordance with the Word of God. Whereas, not being a new lump bespeaks those Churches which walk by carnal standards and worldly ways, or by soulical standards and self-righteous ways. The former should never change; the latter will only change depending on our faith, humility and obedience to God and His Word.

In this light and with this understanding, we see that Paul desires every Church to be a new lump, which means every known sin in the Assembly must be dealt with according to Scripture. Some sins must be dealt with by excommunication (as we will see), and other sins must be dealt with by admonition and exhortations, not excommunication, (as we will also see). Sins are dealt with differently in Scripture, but each known sin must be dealt with, if an Assembly is to be a new lump. (See Fig. 1 page 7.)

Moreover, it should also be mentioned that sometimes an Assembly might not aware of any known sin, but that does not mean they are automatically a new lump, for their ignorance of any known sin might be because of their own spiritual arrogance and blindness. We should not forget that Christians can still act like Pharisees. They were not aware of any known sin against themselves either, but our Lord still warned His disciples about their leaven! (Luke 12:1; cf. Acts 15:5).

As such, some Assemblies may not be a new lump, despite the fact that they are not aware of any known sin in their midst that needs to be dealt with according to Scripture, because they are so dull of hearing, they are so filled with spiritual pride, they are so soulical in their walk that their hearts are hardened by hypocrisy and their spiritual arrogance (cf. Revelation 3:15-17). These usually will be the Assemblies who think they are the only true Church in a place, or that they are the only Church that has the presence of Christ in their midst. Such spiritual pride is leaven in and of itself, and precludes that Assembly from also being a new lump, despite their claim, and yet our brother Darby never disowned them!

Yet, even with those Assemblies, who are so proud and spiritually arrogant, who willingly excommunicate whole Assemblies themselves, they should never be disowned or excommunicated by others. As we have said, there is no such thing in Scripture as wholesale excommunication of one Assembly, by another. There is only individual excommunication of one within one's own local Assembly in Scripture. The only One who can excommunicate an entire Assembly in Scripture is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we must be careful to never usurp His sole authority to do so as the Chief Shepherd, sole Bishop of our souls, and the only Head of the Church upon earth. And, even with the Church of Laodicea, as self-righteous and blind as they were, we do not see the Lord excommunicating them. We do not see the Lord disowning them. But we do see the Lord telling them that he chastens those whom He loves.

Perhaps, it might be helpful to provide a quote by John R. Caldwell, regarding leaven and this overzealous attitude by some that so easily disowns another Assembly that is judged to not to be a new lump, simply because they think if they do not do so, they will be in fellowship with evil—

“But what is meant by saying they are “in fellowship with evil?” It does not mean that they hold evil doctrine: nor even that they have fellowship where evil doctrine is held or taught...What, then, is meant by this being “in fellowship with evil?” It is, that in some mysterious and remote way, someone is received in some meeting from another meeting where there is someone who holds or teaches some evil doctrine. Thus to endless degrees of association, and down through forty years, is this defilement theory traced. The Scripture adduced in proof of this being the mind of the Lord is, “**A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.**” The accent is carefully placed on the “eth,” “leaveneth” —i.e., if leaven be there the whole lump is leavened. The whole Corinthian Church therefore was leavened! **But does Scripture say so? Certainly not.**

If the Corinthian Church was, as a whole, *leavened*, how absurd to call upon them to purge out the leaven! The parable in Matt. xiii. shows that leaven hid in meal *goes on to leaven* the rest, but that this does not take place the moment the leaven is introduced is evident from the words ‘till the whole was leavened’... **But the Exclusive theory that, if leaven be there, the whole is leavened, substitutes for the practical truth of the passage a defilement theory of their own which has no place in Scripture, and which is invented and persisted in to maintain an unscriptural position...** But this again is supported by reference to 2 John 11, “For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” The new revision has it more correctly, “For he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.” Therefore say they, You must treat the one who greets him exactly as you would treat the evil person himself ; and, further,

you must treat the one who greets him in like manner *ad infinitum*! But is this the Lord's teaching?

Commenting upon Num. v. 1-4, J. N. Darby in his Synopsis, only remarks curtly, "Every defilement was to be purged out." But this is not what Scripture says, and this is exactly in point, and shows clearly **wherein their whole defilement theory is a going beyond Scripture, and consequently results in substituting a Pharisaic separation for the practical power of detecting and judging evil.**

If you search through Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, you will find that there were two distinct classes of defilement under the law. The three specified defilements in Num. v. were each of such a nature that the ceremonial law required a period of eight days to elapse ere they could be restored to the fellowship of the sanctuary. But there were endless minor defilements of contagion (see Num. xix. 21, 22) which might be cleansed by the evening. The judgment of the first class of defilements was committed to Israel—THEY were responsible to see that such were placed *outside* the camp. But the judgment of the second class of defilements is nowhere committed to the congregation, but was matter for self-judgment as before Jehovah. The leper was to be put outside the camp; but where do we find that the one who touched the leper is to be treated in the same way by the congregation? The one who had an issue was to be put outside, but the one who sat in his chair was also defiled. Yet where do we find that such an one was to be treated as the one with the issue? So, whilst John enjoins the elect lady not to receive or to greet certain evil persons, Scripture goes no further; but is silent as to how one should be treated who so fails as to greet the evil person.¹⁰⁶

Thus their *theory* of defilement forces upon them the shocking necessity of judging those whom personally they would regard with affection and esteem—with whom they could have most blessed fellowship in the Spirit, and whom they acknowledge as walking in perhaps closer intimacy with God than many of themselves—as "defiled persons," "leavened," and therefore not to be associated with in service, fellowship, or even the ordinary courtesies of life, but treated as if they themselves were "blasphemers of the Lord Jesus."¹⁰⁷

So we see that even the Assemblies that view themselves as being the most spiritual and pleasing to God are not free from the taint of leaven. It infects us all, causing us to walk as mere men, soulical in our walk, unable to understand certain things of the Spirit of God, and in some unfortunate situations, very carnal in adopting the ways of the world, so much so, that some have the leaven of malice against our other brethren.

¹⁰⁶ John R. Caldwell, ed., *The Northern Witness*, Vol. XII (The Publishing Office, Glasgow, 1882) see pg. 154-155

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 155

Beloved, our Lord desires us to walk with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, humbling seeking the light of the Lord to make known to us any leaven within ourselves, so as to not be puffed up. The Holy Spirit through Paul makes known to us that He desires us to be a new lump, a spiritual Assembly, that is humble as the Lord, having His mind in us, so we can worship and walk in a way that is pleasing to the Lord, so that we can celebrate the feast, our remembrance of the Lord, with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. This is what will bring honor to the Lord on His sacred day. When we recognize this, we will not disown an Assembly that has never been disowned by the Lord.

Even two of the most leavened Assemblies in Scripture—Thyatira and Laodicea—were never disowned by the Lord, but rather were chastened in love. Nor did He ever refuse communion and/or Table fellowship to those who, while being free of the leaven themselves, nevertheless, were still in the Assembly (Rev. 2:25). In fact, in the case of anyone in the Assembly in Laodicea, the Lord Jesus specifically said He would eat with any who would open their door (Rev.3:20). How different is this attitude of our Lord than that of our brother Darby, who said, “I do not the least confine discipline to the Table; where persons deliberately take up the loose principle, I have nothing to say to them in divine things anywhere—**could not say grace at table with them**, and am of course blamed for exclusiveness.”¹⁰⁸

Beloved, our brother Darby acts like he should not be blamed for exclusiveness. Rather, the sad fact is he should be blamed for exclusiveness. He lost his way. His attitude was an evil, and sinful, in and of itself, as revealed in Scripture. He was being more zealous than his Lord and was encouraging other Christians to follow him in his false zeal fueled by self-righteousness. And it is an unfortunate reality that such attitudes still prevail among many brethren today.

It is a dangerous thing to be more zealous than the Lord, for his zealousness is perfect, so anything more zealous than Him, or anything less zealous than Him, would be imperfect and wrong. When some excommunicate whole assemblies in their zeal, such a thing is being more zealous than the Lord and so is wrong

This should cause every Assembly to remain vigilant against such behavior arising in their midst. Unfortunately, such brethren will still

¹⁰⁸ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 268-269

sneak into Assemblies to spread their false teaching of exclusiveness. They sneak in and begin to cause trouble quietly spreading their own form of leaven and false zealotry among what might have otherwise been considered a new lump until the arrival of their leaven of false zeal. Unfortunately, I have witnessed this myself, and it has caused nothing but heartache and division. Like their brethren of old who had the same false zealotry, they still enter Assemblies seeking to bring other brethren into the bondage of their false theories of “separation from evil” being the basis of the unity of the Spirit.

Galatians 2:4 But *it was* because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. NASB

Now, let us continue to the final portion of this text in I Cor. 5 and examine those sins the Holy Spirit does say will require the removal of the sinning brother or sister. As we said, some sins require immediate removal and other sins require patient admonition.

I Corinthians 5:11-13 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an **immoral person**, or **covetous**, or an **idolater**, or a **reviler**, or a **drunkard**, or a **swindler**-- not even to eat with such a one.¹² For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?¹³ But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. NASB

Sin is sin, whether a small one or a big one. It must be judged; as, the English proverb goes— “What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.” A little drop of poison will still spoil the purity of water; we must be *righteous* and *consistent* in our judgment of all sin. Some sins require the self-judgment of the believer (I Cor. 11:31), some, the wise admonition of a spiritual brother (Gal. 6:1), and other sins require the public judgment of the Assembly as we see above (I Cor. 5:11, Titus 3:10; II Jn. 1:9-11); these three types of judgments should never be confused. A sin requiring self-judgment or a sin requiring the wise admonition of a spiritual brother should never be publically judged by the Assembly. The same is true conversely, of course. And so, we see the sins that require public judgments in I Cor. 5:11 are—a life of immorality, covetousness, idolatry, railing or reviling, drunkenness, and any swindling or defrauding of another.

These are the recurring sins that the Holy Spirit says must not be tolerated in an Assembly—these lifestyle sins of one who calls himself or herself a Christian require excommunication. (We will discuss this later under the appropriate verses, but doctrinal sins also require excommunication as we will see. But for now we are just referring to this list of non-doctrinal sins.) We should never add to this list given to us, nor should we subtract from this list. We should never allow our hearts to become narrower than strictures of Scripture, nor should we allow them to become broader. The Lord has given His Church everything necessary to life and godliness and that includes Church discipline. What is recorded in Scripture is sufficient and wise. Do we question the sufficiency of Scripture? Do we possess more wisdom than our Lord? Can our concern for the sanctity and purity of the Church ever be greater than the Lord's concern for the sanctity and purity of His Church, which is His Bride? Of course not!

But some ignore this list and keep adding other sins to it, declaring that they also require our separation and our excommunication. Beloved, if we keep adding to this list, this supposed evil or that supposed evil, the standard will become so high that every church will have to be emptied, for until we are glorified with Christ Jesus we will always be imperfect and be filled with some possible evil and sin; and sometimes it will be sins of which we may not even be aware! If we keep adding to our lists we will find that divisions within divisions will not only continue, they will actually increase, and two divisions will become four divisions and four divisions will become eight, with each division believing they are maintaining the purity of the one Assembly of God on earth.

If the truth be known, until we are glorified, we will always have sin or some evil in our life needing to be forgiven and cleansed (I Jn. 1:8-9). We all commit sin, and God is most certainly aware of our every sin, but in our sinful state He does not separate from us because our Christian walk has not yet reached a certain level of purity, or reached the sinless state that He desires!

If God views and treats us in this manner, should we not view and treat each other in the same way? Does not the Lord speak to this principle in His parable of the king settling the accounts of His servants in Matt. 18:23-35?

Matt. 18:23-35 For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had

begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses. NASB

Are we not glad that the Lord never adopted the standard for excommunication and separation adopted by some of our brethren today? For, if our Lord had adopted that standard, He never would have tabernacled in our midst. He never would have been born of Mary. He never would have allowed Himself to grow up in the midst of sinners, or allow Himself, for instance, to *attend* the synagogue services in Nazareth. (Could we not say that if Bethesda was considered guilty of the sin of association and so was a gathering that our brother Darby said required one to separate from, then, in their own dispensation, the synagogue in Nazareth would have been guilty of the same evil of association? And yet, did the Lord Jesus believe He must separate from them, because of their evil. Did He believe that He must never pass over the threshold of their synagogue as long as they were still guilty of that evil, as our brother Darby believed he must never attend the meeting at Bethesda, saying, "For my own part I should neither go to Bethesda in its *present state*, nor while in that state go where persons from it were knowingly admitted."¹⁰⁹ Are we not thankful that our Lord did not have that same mindset, for if He did He never would have crossed the threshold of this earthly globe, if you will? Rather, our brother Darby should have had the mindset, i.e. the mind of Christ, as should we all. We should always walk as Jesus walked in the same love and patience.)

¹⁰⁹ J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Volume 15* (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames, 1964) pg. 257

Equally, are we not glad that the Holy Spirit did not adopt a standard for excommunication and separation that some of our brethren have adopted? For, if He had, He never would dwell in our hearts. He never would dwell in each Assembly (as in a temple), nor would He have dwelt in the church of Corinth, a carnal church still filled with much self-serving sin.

I Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? NASB

How wonderful it is that the Holy Spirit dwells in and “receives” us, not because of our righteousness, or because we have reached a certain level of sanctification, but He dwells in us and receives us because of *Christ’s righteousness*, and because of *Christ’s sanctification* of Himself (cf. John 17:19; I Cor. 1:30).

Oh, blessed thought, to be accepted in the Beloved. May we ever receive those brethren who are received by Christ (who are not committing sins of excommunication), for if we allow human tradition to guide the parameters of our reception and do not judge in truth in accordance with the parameters of Scripture, then our rejection of a brother might be a rejection of Christ in our brother. What a terrible thing that would be, to reject Christ in our brother and so have, in one sense, have Christ outside the Assembly, knocking on the door, wishing to come in and sup with us.

And this brings us to the final thought regarding the parameters of reception and the parameters of separation and excommunication. Sadly, within the history of those gathered in the name of the Lord, the oneness of that blessed Name has been marred by false separations. Some have determined that any Assembly, which condemns the heresy of a teacher who was rightly excommunicated in another Assembly, but were willing to receive some those brethren from that Assembly, who, while not holding to that heretical viewpoint, nevertheless remained in some type of fellowship with that brother, to be guilty of the same sin and so should not be received, and if they were received, then that Assembly who received them must also be considered excommunicated. They viewed those Christian’s sin of association (for to remain in fellowship with a heretic is a sin) to rise to the level requiring excommunication. This was based upon John’s admonition in II Jn. 1:11 to not associate with a heretic.

Now, no doubt, if those brethren from that other Assembly mentioned in the above example act like nothing is wrong, and, therefore, continue to associate with one who continues in one of those sins requiring excommunication, they are, themselves, violating Scripture, and, therefore, indeed, are becoming partakers of that person's evil deeds. That is a serious matter that cannot be ignored or lightly glossed over. But it must be remembered the Holy Spirit did not list this type of naïve, false and immature toleration, as an additional sin requiring excommunication! Nowhere does Scripture command such a thing as bad and sinful as such toleration is.

Now someone may ask, "How can that be? Such toleration of evil is a direct violation of Scripture." This is true! But let me ask, "Is not toleration of strife or division an evil and a direct violation of Scripture?"

I Corinthians 1:10-13 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? KJV

Of course it is, but Paul did not deliver such ones who tolerated such strife and division to Satan, nor did Paul tell the church in Corinth to remove such direct violators of Scripture from the Assembly. In fact, he did not even forbid the Lord Table to those who "tolerated" such strife and division. Indeed, he did not even forbid the Lord's Table to those who were actually committing the actual evil of strife and division in Corinth (I Cor. 11:18-19)! But he most assuredly warned them of their sin and told them if they did not judge it themselves the Lord would judge them (See I Cor. 11:18-34). But he did not excommunicate them as he did the brother committing the evil of immorality. Why? If those direct violators of Scripture, who were saying they were of "so and so" (like many believers do today when they say, "I am of Calvin," or, "I am a five point Calvinist," or, "I am an Arminian,") are not excommunicated from the Assembly, why are the direct violators of II Jn. 1:11 excommunicated, i.e. those who are not heretical, but still give a Godspeed to one they should not? Both violations are evil, and both are dishonoring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, someone may say because the sin of II Jn. 1:9-11 is so much worse than strife and division. Well, that is left open for discussion for party strife is just as dishonoring to Christ as is any sin. But let's assume the sin of II Jn. 1:9-11 is a worse sin than party strife, what about the sin of pride. What can be worse than that sin? Is it not that the first sin listed as an abomination to the Lord?

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: **A proud look**, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. Prov. 6:16-19 KJV

Was it not the first sin ever committed in the universe, the sin of pride by Lucifer—what sin could be worse than that? Most certainly, such a sin is a direct violation of Scripture, so why is not the sin of pride considered an evil requiring excommunication, but the sin of II Jn. 1:11 is a sin requiring excommunication? If separation from evil is the only basis of unity, why do not brethren excommunicate every brother with a proud heart? What can be more evil than haughty eyes? Obviously, something more is going on here for sin is sin and we should keep ourselves pure from all sin, yet Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, made a distinction between sins which must require excommunication and sins which do not, thus showing that separation from evil is not the basis of our unity, but rather, the basis of our unity is blood of Christ, which is that which forms the bond of unity.

The truth of this matter is demonstrated in the fact that, in spite of their false toleration, Paul still gave the Church his greeting and farewell under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 13:11), something, again, he would never do if he considered their sin of toleration to be a sin also requiring excommunication and separation.

The important point to see is there is a difference in the Lord's mind between sins requiring excommunication, and sins, which do not rise to that level. As such, even though, according to the principle of II Jn. 1:11, they were partaking of another's evil deeds by their toleration (a serious sin in itself) they were never committing the actual sin requiring excommunication. And so, again, we must be careful to not exceed what is written. We must not become narrower than Scripture in our judgments. If we do, we are effectively saying the Lord has less concern for the sanctity of the Church than we do. We are effectively saying,

“We are more zealous than the Lord.” Dear brethren, how could that ever be possible?

Now, no doubt, all sin is dangerous, and should not be lightly esteemed. Even though it may not rise to the level of sin requiring excommunication, if left unjudged by the believer it could lead into those sins that do require excommunication! The recurring sins that are listed as requiring excommunication—a life of immorality, covetousness, idolatry, railing or reviling, drunkenness, and swindling or defrauding of another—many times begin with sins that do not require excommunication.

For instance, the sin of self-centeredness, which makes one think of themselves as more highly than they ought to think (Rom. 12:3), is not a sin rising to the level of excommunication, but it is an evil, and is a form of leaven, nonetheless. In the last days Paul says men will be lovers of self (II Tim. 3:2). Yet, if this deeply rooted sin in everyone’s heart is left unjudged by the work of the cross (Matt. 16:24), it could grow into “envy,” which, in turn, may eventually lead into a life of covetousness, which is a sin requiring excommunication!

Or just having a disagreement with other believers, may lead one into anger, which is not a sin requiring excommunication (but is no less a form of leaven), but if left to fester, after a while, it may lead into a hardening of one’s heart and so could lead to one to become a “reviler,” one who ends up vilifying other brethren, just like the reviler listed in I Cor. 5:11, and being a reviler is one of those sins requiring excommunication. (Oh, how this sin plagues those who think they are the ones pleasing to God.)

Or, take another one, a believer who preoccupies himself or herself with their own conjectures and/or interpretations of Scripture, to the point of adding to Scripture, or subtracting from Scripture, or even twisting Scripture, might end up falling into false doctrine, eventually becoming a “heretic.” If that happens then one is like the one listed in Titus 3:10 and so must be rejected. In such a case, excommunication would be required by the Assembly; but until that time came, such sins, though serious and in need of judgment, do not rise to the level of separation, but rather, a continued forbearance in mercy and love, filled with a righteous admonition and patient exhortation in the truth.

What is so ironic in all of this is that sometimes we will refuse fellowship to brethren from other Assemblies because of certain sins or certain tolerations, yet, at the same time, we will never judge the sins of certain brethren within our own midst who have become hardened and bitter in their own hearts toward other brethren, so much so, that they sometimes actually vilify fellow believers unjustly. Does this not rise to the level of sins requiring the public judgment of the Assembly listed in I Cor. 5:11? Is not dishonest vilification the same thing as “railing?” Yet why do we not separate ourselves from those brethren in our midst; why do we not consistently apply the strictures of I Cor. 5:11? Could it be we are showing partiality, being more lenient in our spirits with those within our own circle who agree with us? And, if so, is not that partiality itself an evil in its own right? If we are going to judge other sins, why is not the sin of partiality judged? Scripture is clear; partiality should never arise in our hearts (Rom. 2:11; I Tim.5:21; James 2:9).

So in conclusion, we have seen that those sins listed in I Cor. 5:11 do require the Church discipline of excommunication. But we have also seen other sins or evil do not rise to that level requiring excommunication. With that knowledge before us, let us continue our study and look at the other verses given to us in Scripture that require Church Discipline and examine which one require removal from the Assembly and which ones do not. Let us begin with those sins of false doctrine (i.e. heresy) and those sins of association and toleration as revealed by the apostle John in his second epistle.

Doctrinal Sins—II John 1:9-11

In turning to Scripture let us keep clearly before our minds the question at issue. Does association with a teacher known to teach false doctrine defile the believer to the point requiring excommunication; or must the false doctrine first be imbibed by the believer before a defilement occurs which requires excommunication?

But before we proceed, we must first mention that unless we establish the importance of maintaining a literal hermeneutic, there will be no agreement upon this point, for each party will come with a set of presuppositions that are based upon logic and not the actual words written by the Holy Spirit. This important biblical principle of maintaining a literal hermeneutic (in all study of God's Word) is found in the Gospel of John. The Holy Spirit inspired John to record this incident in Peter's life.

John 21:21-23 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me. ²³ Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? KJV

Notice how the Holy Spirit admonishes us to be careful with simply making logical conclusions in our minds regarding any portion of Scripture, and then assume our logical conclusions must be true! Rather, the Holy Spirit admonishes us to closely follow exactly what it states, not what we assume it states. In the verse before us, the Lord Jesus replied to Peter's question with a simple, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"—which everyone assumed to mean that John would not die before the Lord returned. Perhaps, they logically assumed that since Jesus did not say out right, "No, he will not tarry or live until I return," that Jesus must mean the opposite. But the Holy Spirit warns us through the following words of John that we must always be careful to never exceed what is written, but follow the text closely. John then tells his readers this: "Yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

This story teaches us that we should never allow our logic to force a nebulous verse to fit with a crystal clear verse. Each verse stands or falls

on its own and will perfectly fit with every other verse in Scripture if we maintain a literal hermeneutic. Sometimes, however, we must be patient and put a verse to the side until we have a fuller picture. It is like a puzzle. Sometimes we might think for sure this piece must fit in a certain place and so we try to force it into a place where it does not fit; but we force it to fit, which in turn will mar the overall picture. But if we were but patient and put together the rest of the puzzle with pieces which fit perfect with one another, we will finally see where that one piece of the puzzle really goes, and it will fall into place perfectly without having to try to force it into place.

God's Word is the most precise book in the world, for it is perfect in every way. Everything means exactly what it says. It does not say too little, or say too much. It says just the right amount. If it seems to us to say too little, we must be careful not to add our thought or conclusions to it. Conversely, if it seems to say too much, we must be careful to dilute it or subtract from it to better fit in with our preconceived ideas.

If in our lives upon earth, we sometimes are willing to have contracts carefully drawn up by lawyers to protect our assets and/or interests because we do not want anyone to find a loophole in order to defraud us. And if we look for a good lawyer who will be able to carefully choose every single word in the contract to carefully say exactly what we wish it to say, so that if someone wishes to wiggle out of its obligations, we can then point to a specific clause or sentence that protects us. And if we believe such carefully worded earthly contracts are sacrosanct, how much more should we bring the same mindset to the eternal Word of God!

Beloved, the Holy Spirit chooses words so much more carefully that any earthly lawyer could. Do we really think an earthly lawyer can be better in their choice of words than the Holy Spirit! Nothing in God's Word is said imperfectly or in a less than perfect way. It means exactly what it says. Our Lord says that even the smallest jot and tittle are important. Even the most significant conjunction is important and should not be considered redundant or unimportant. It is not the thoughts that are inspired apart from the words, but the words that inspired to convey the intended thoughts together as a whole.

Or let us consider another example to speak to this issue. When it comes to our form of government in America, many Christians will demand more precision in following the exact wording of our Constitution, than

they do, unfortunately today to the Word of God (as demonstrated by the acceptance translations that utilize a less than complete equivalence form of translations). They will cry foul to anyone who “loosely” interprets the Bill of Rights, or who calls the Constitution a document that can be interpreted by modern understanding and wisdom. Or they decry anyone who reads into the text, and would be aghast at anyone who would consider that the words of the Constitution must be interpreted through the eyeglasses of modern linguistics that changes the actual words of the text to different words than were written, because the revisers believing it does not matter because “**they**” conclude they are being faithful to the original thoughts! And so, such Christians take pride in being called “strict constructionists,” rather than “loose constructionists.” They are opposed to one who reads into the Constitution and takes liberties with a clear statement of the Constitution.

Beloved, if we are so careful in the exactness and sanctity of our contracts, and especially in the social contract of our government—the Constitution, how much more, multiplied times over, should we be careful in respecting the exactness and sanctity of God’s Word.

So with that in mind, let us pray to the Lord that we will be able follow the exact wording of these important verses regarding discipline in the Church and seek His wisdom and guidance in not approaching them with our preconceived ideas.

In John’s second epistle, we read,

II John 1:9-11 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹ for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” KJV

This passage clearly contemplates two persons—one holding false doctrine as to the Person of Christ, the other, a person who willingly receives that person into his house and wishes him Godspeed. The passage does not say, or imply, that this second person holds the false doctrine, but rather he associates himself by an act of fellowship with the man that does hold false doctrine, and, by so doing, is called “a partaker of his evil deeds.” If then God calls this man a partaker of evil deeds, he is surely in the wrong, and that, not because he has imbibed the evil doctrine himself, but because he is knowingly associated with a man that holds the false doctrine.

Now a few points need to be made to help us understand this portion of Scripture. First of all, Greek is an inflected language wherein the number of the word, including verbs, is indicated by its ending. Thus, unlike many verbs in English today, a Greek verb is inflected to indicate either a singular or plural number. Not only that, the number of a Greek personal pronoun is indicated by different forms, whereas in today’s English the same word, *you*, is used for either the singular or plural pronoun used as subjects or objects.

However, for those who prefer the King James Version, we should also mention that, unlike the English of today, the English of the King James Version did distinguish singular and plural pronouns used as a subject or object as follows. The singular pronoun σὺ was rendered as *thou*. The plural pronoun ὑμεῖς was rendered *ye*. And for personal pronouns used as an object, the King James rendered the singular pronoun σε as *thee* and the plural pronoun ὑμᾶς as *you* (see Fig. 2 below). This is important when we look to the contextual parameters of the epistle.

Fig. 2 Second Person Singular and Plural Personal Pronouns in King James Version

King James Version			Modern English Versions		
Case	Singular	Plural	Case	Singular	Plural
Subject (Nominative)	Thou	Ye	Subject (Nominative)	You	You
Possessive (Genitive)	Thy/ Thine	Your	Possessive (Genitive)	Your	Your
Object (Accusative or Dative)	Thee	You	Object (Accusative or Dative)	You	You

For example, when we read a modern version of verse 5 and 6, we do not see the number change of the pronoun or verb that is indicated by the Greek.

II John 1: 1, 5-6 The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth ⁵And now I ask you, lady,

not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. NASB

The apostle John addresses the “elect” or “chosen lady” of verse 1, which is the “lady” of verse 5 as you, and concludes with the fact in verse 6 that “this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.” In today’s English we would assume the personal pronoun “you” (in the English) of verse 6 was referring back to the “you” of verse 5, i.e. to the “lady” of verse 5, which, in turn refers to the “chosen (elect) lady” of verse 1. But that is not the case. Let us now read the King James Version of the text.

II John 1: 1, 5-6 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; ⁵ And now I beseech thee (sing.), lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee (sing.), but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. ⁶And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard (plural) from the beginning, ye should walk (plural) in it. KJV

In the KJV, the English indicates that John switched to a plural personal pronoun in verse 6 (although in Greek this is indicated by a plural inflected verb, not by a plural pronoun). It shows that in verse 5 he does, indeed, address a lady (indicated by the singular “thee”) but in verse 6 John switches to the plural subject inflected in the verb (indicated by the plural “ye”) showing this singular entity is also plural.

The same thing happens in verse 10 and 11. When one reads a modern English version like the NASB one might assume the personal pronoun “you” in verse 10 is singular, because verse 11 begins with the phrase “for the one” (singular).

II John 1:10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. NASB

But the KJV shows this is not the case. Remember, the second person plural pronoun ὑμεῖς is rendered as *you* in the KJV.

II John 1:10-11 If there come any unto you (plural), and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. KJV

Therefore, when John wrote in verse 10 about one coming to *you*, he was not writing about one coming to the lady as an individual (which one might think from today's English versions, since "*you*" translates both singular and plural pronouns in today's English). In the Greek, John uses the plural personal pronoun ὑμεῖς, not the singular personal pronoun σε. If he had the King James Version would have translated it as "If there come any unto **thee**."

Not only that, the two Greek verbs translated "come" (ἔρχεται) and "bring" (φέρει) in verse 10 are inflected as singular verbs, but the very next two Greek verbs in verse 10, translated as "receive" (λαμβάνετε) and "bid" (λέγετε), are inflected as plural verbs.

So if we seek to reflect the underlying Greek, we might render verse 10 and 11 into Southern American English (which distinguishes their singular personal pronoun *you*, from their plural personal pronoun *you all*, by pronouncing it as *y'all*) as follows—"If there come any unto *y'all*, and bring not this doctrine, *y'all* do not receive him into a house, neither *y'all* bid him God speed. For *he* who is saying to him, God speed, is communing with the evil deeds of him."

Then, finally, as we see above in verse 11, all the Greek verbs become singular inflected verbs again, so the English pronoun *he* is included in the singular inflected verbal participle λέγων.

So, now that we see these changes from the singular to the plural number, one might ask, "Why?" Without going into all the reasons, this seems to confirm that the Elect Lady to whom this epistle is addressed is a designation for the local Church and not an individual Christian mother with her family. In this sense the children symbolize the members of the local Church. This collective sense is also confirmed by the Greek verb in the phrase "the children greet thee" in verse 13, for "greet" (ἀσπάζεται) which is inflected as a singular verb, is construed with a plural subject "children" (τέκνα), which in Greek means the plural must be taken as a collective plural understood as singular. John could have used a plural inflected verb for greeting (ἀσπάζονται) with the plural subject, but he did not, perhaps, again, indicating that he sees them as a collective whole, thus showing that he is writing to a local Church under the appellation of a lady and her children.

So, when John says if any comes unto *y'all* and does not bring this doctrine of Christ, he is saying (by his switch to the plural) something

like the following—”If someone “comes”¹¹⁰ into the Assembly and takes advantage of the open nature of your Church meetings (also cf. this practice occurring in synagogues—Acts 13:15-16), and, as such, rises up and begins to speak and you shortly realize this person is proclaiming false doctrine, which is going beyond the doctrine of Christ, *y’all* do not receive him.”

Or, conversely, at the minimum, if the person never rose up publicly, but was first asked privately by the elders of the Church, before the Church meeting starts, about the nature of their teaching, and they find out his teaching is heretical, but he still decides to attend the Church meeting, then, John would be saying to the Church as a whole to be careful that *y’all* do not receive him, which would mean to not allow him to address the assembly.

And this brings us to the next part of this verse. Notice the NASB renders it with *yours* in italics—”do not receive him into *your* house.” Also the use of italic in the KJV indicates that possessive pronoun *yours* is not in the Greek text. Nor does the Greek utilize a definite article with the noun “house,” which could be construed possessively in Greek. The noun is completely anarthrous. Therefore, nothing grammatical in the Greek is present to definitely indicate this is possessive. The translators understood it that way by their understanding of the context.

Therefore, beginning with their contextual understanding, there are a number different ways it could be legitimately rendered into English—1)—a possessive—”do not receive him into **your** house,” which could mean, depending on one’s view as to whom the lady is, that woman’s house, or, the Church’s house, so to speak, where they met. In this case, this person would be known to be a heretic before there ever was a possibility such a one might walk into the house where the Church was meeting. But, this would be unusual for most Assemblies would not prohibit a sinner from coming to hear the gospel being preached, which would have to be the case if the house referred to the house where the Church gathered. Or, John could be saying 2)—”do not receive him into **the** house.” This is a possibility, even without a Greek definite article because a noun can be considered definite in a prepositional phrase in Greek. If this was the case, it could be one particular house set aside by

¹¹⁰ Compare this concept of one “coming” into an Assembly, whether of Paul in I Cor. 14:6 or an unbeliever in I Cor. 14:23, or of false teachers (as here) in II Cor. 11:4.

the Church for hospitality, and so have nothing to do with receiving him into a Church meeting. Or it could be rendered 3)—”do not receive him into *a* house,” not because Greek has an indefinite article (which it does not) but because this is how an anarthrous Greek noun is many times rendered into English. In other word, since John does not use the definite article, he is saying this person is not to be received into any house of the saints. Or it could be rendered 4)—”do not receive him into *the private setting of a house or home*,” indicating the private character of a domicile, in contrast to the public character of the Assembly. This last suggestion, however, is unlikely, because John has not used the word *ecclesia* in the text to make the contrast. It is simply inferred by the plural inflected verb. Thus, of all these possibilities, I believe the first and last to be the least likely, leaving possibility two and three as the best choices.

Before I explain why two or three seem to be the best choice, I must explain what the phrase, to receive one into a house could mean in certain cases, during those early days of the Church. It is possible that John was referring to the common practice of giving a stranger or traveler hospitality and lodging. This form of Christian hospitality was rooted in the Old Testament practice of hospitality (see especially Judges 19: 18), which was also practiced in the New Testament.

Judges 19:18, 20-21 And he said unto him, We *are* passing from Bethlehemjudah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence *am* I: and I went to Bethlehemjudah, but I *am now* going to the house of the LORD; and there *is* no man that **receiveth me to house.**²⁰ And the old man said, Peace *be* with thee; howsoever *let* all thy wants *lie* upon me; only lodge not in the street.²¹ So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink. KJV

Genesis 19:2-3 And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.³ And he pressed upon them greatly; **and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house;** and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. KJV

Job 31:32 The stranger did not lodge in the street: **but I opened my doors to the traveller.** KJV

Matthew 10:11-13 And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.¹² **And when ye come into**

an house, salute it. ¹³ And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. KJV

Matthew 25:35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, **and ye took me in:** KJV

Acts 18:4, 6-8 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. ⁶ And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment, and said unto them, Your blood *be* upon your own heads; I *am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. ⁷ And he departed thence, **and entered into a certain *man's* house, named Justus**, *one* that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. ⁸ And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Alfred Edersheim addresses this common courtesy of hospitality of receiving one into a house that was still practiced in the New Testament—

“Israel was always distinguished for hospitality; and not only the Bible, but the Rabbis, enjoin this in the strongest terms. In Jerusalem no man was to account a house as only his own; and it was said, that during the pilgrim-feasts none ever wanted ready reception. The tractate Aboth (1.5), mentions these as two out of the three sayings of Jose, the son of Jochanan, of Jerusalem: “Let thy house be wide open, and let the poor be the children of thy house...” In Jerusalem it seems to have been the custom to hang a curtain in front of the door, to indicate that there was still room for guests. Some went so far as to suggest, there should be four doors to every house, to bid welcome to travellers from all directions. The host would go to meet an expected guest, and again accompany him part of the way (Acts xxi. 5). The Rabbis declared that hospitality involved as great, and greater merit than early morning attendance in an academy of learning.... Thus it was declared, that “the entertainment of travellers was as great a matter as the reception of the Shechinah.” ¹¹¹

And it seems to have been a common thing for synagogues to be built with guest houses attached to the synagogue proper, where travellers could then be given hospitality. In fact, there was an archeological discovery made in the 20th century in Jerusalem of an inscription which speaks of this very practice.

“An interesting inscription...was discovered at Jerusalem, however, which undoubtedly is to be dated before A.D. 70. It records the building of a

¹¹¹ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (A. I. Bradley & Co., Boston, 1876) pg. 47-48

synagogue by a certain Theodotus, whose family had had the honor of holding the office of ruler of the synagogue for three generations. Indeed the cornerstone had been laid already by the father and the grandfather of Theodotus, together with the elders (presbyters) of the synagogue and Simonides who doubtless had given some special gift toward the building. The enterprise, as Theodotus carries it to completion, included not only the erection of the synagogue proper **but also the construction of a guest house and apartments for pilgrims from afar**, together with arrangement for water for ritual washings.”¹¹²

Not only that, it is likely that those Jews in the Diaspora followed the same practice and it may have been a guest-house wherein Paul lodged at first in Corinth, much to the consternation of those Jews which did not believe Paul’s good news.

Acts 18:7 And he departed thence, **and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.**

Also, Apollos was received into the house of Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26).

Thus, if a local Church was made up of many Jewish Christians, it was more than likely that they would always be careful to have a house ready for hospitality for travelling believers, since Jewish believers were always taught that such hospitality was a blessed deed.

This practiced continued even after the death of the apostles, as found in a document (*The Didache*), which was written shortly after the time of John’s second epistle, which Philip Schaff says, “fills a gap between the Apostolic age and the Church of the second century.”¹¹³ The document states the following regarding this continuing practice of hospitality.

“But let everyone that cometh in the name of the Lord **be received**, and afterward ye shall prove and know him; for ye shall have understanding right and left. **If he who cometh is a wayfarer, assist him as far as ye are able; but he shall not remain with you, except for two or three days, if need be.** But if he willeth to abide with you, being an artisan, let him work and eat; but if he hath no trade, according to your understanding see to it that, as a Christian, he

¹¹² Jack Finegan, *Light From The Ancient Past The Archeological Background Of The Hebrew-Christian Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1946) pg. 228

¹¹³ Philip Schaff, *The Oldest Church Manual, Called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, the Didache and Kindred Documents* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1885) pg. v.

shall not live with you idle. But if he willeth not so to do, he is a Christ-monger. **Watch that ye keep aloof from such.**”¹¹⁴

Therefore, knowing that hospitality was an important and continuing practice in the early Church, being rooted in the hospitality of the Old Testament, referenced by our Lord in the Gospels (Matt. 10:11-13; 25:35), and affirmed by the Holy Spirit in the epistles, where, for example, Paul says the saints should be “given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:13), and where the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2 NASB), this is more than likely what happened in the local Church that John was addressing.

By the late first century more and more false teachers, prophets and so-called apostles were going from Church to Church speaking, supposedly, in the name of the Lord as can be demonstrated by these verses.

II Corinthians 11:4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully. NASB

II Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. NASB

Revelation 2:2 I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; NASB

This was a real danger (as continuing to be referenced later in *The Didache*) because, obviously, not everyone had letters of commendation, and even if they had, it was not unusual for such heretical teachers to falsify documents (cf. II Thess. 3:17; Gal.6:11).

So, since John’s exhortation in verse 10 states that it is somehow known (before hospitality has even been given) that this person is not abiding in the doctrine of Christ, it seems likely this might be referring to a traveling teacher, prophet, or so-called apostle, who “comes” into the

¹¹⁴Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene fathers: translations of the writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325, Volume 7* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1905) pg. 381

public Assembly of the saints, and stands up during the open ministry portion of the meeting and so begins to teach false doctrine. Of course, the elders or leading brothers would stop such teaching; but what is to be done after that? After a meeting, a stranger would normally be offered hospitality in a guest-house, especially if the stranger was a Christian, but what is to be done since it is obvious this stranger is a heretic. So John then addresses what is to be done with the normal practice of offering hospitality to such travelling strangers. And this brings us back to the reason I believe choice two or three would be a better translation of this phrase in verse 10.

Either, John is saying do not receive him into “the” house (in which case, the Church may have had a well-recognized guest house or room set aside for travelling Christians that would be offered to qualified believers, or he is saying do not receive him into “a” house, meaning that he is telling everyone and anyone in the Church to not offer hospitality to this false teacher or prophet in their own houses.

Consequently, since it somehow became crystal clear in the Church that this person is not genuine, John is saying that once the Church meeting is over to not offer this person hospitality. Do not receive him into “the,” or, “a” house, for that action would give him credibility. And then he adds another stipulation—”neither bid him God speed.”

This last stipulation has been confusing to some, because many modern versions (including Darby) translate this phrase as a salutation, a greeting, which, indeed, it is, and was so used as such many times. Some versions even translate the phrase to mean one should not say “welcome” to someone. And so, because of this, some wonder how can one know beforehand if the one standing before you is someone you should not give a greeting to, or, if a visitor to Church, to not even say “Welcome? Most people greet everybody they come into contact with, as a common courtesy, and only after the greeting begin a conversation. So many wonder what John meant by this stipulation.

However, the King James Version does not translate the Greek word as a “greeting,” but rather as a farewell, a “Godspeed,” which also was another way the same exact word was used. (It pulls double duty.) And, what does “Godspeed” mean? It means to “Go in peace,” “God be with you,” (similar to the Spanish *Vaya con Dios*), a simple “fare –thee-well,” if you will (an archaic wish for well-being from Early Modern English). Regarding this phrase, A. T. Robertson writes:

“Give him no greeting (χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε). “Say not farewell to him.” Apparently χαίρειν here (present active infinitive, object of λέγετε present active imperative with negative μὴ) is used of farewell as in II Cor. 13:11, though usually in the N.T. (Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1) of the salutation. But here the point turns on the stranger bringing into the house (or trying to do so) his heretical and harmful teaching which seems to be after the salutation is over. The usual greeting to a house is given in Luke 10:5. On the other hand, if χαίρειν means greeting, not farewell, here, it can very well be understood of the peril of allowing these Gnostic propagandists to spread their pernicious teachings (cf. Mormons or Bolsheviks) in home and church (usually meeting in the home). This is assuming that the men were known and not mere strangers.”¹¹⁵

And Liddell and Scott in their Greek Lexicon also state that the word carries this dual usage.

“A common form of greeting, **1.** at meeting, *hail, welcome*, Lat. *Salve*, Hom. and Att. (esp. in the morning. Dio C. 69. 18)... **2.** at taking leave and parting, *fare-thee-well, farewell, good-bye*, Lat. *vale*, Od. 5. 205, 13. 59., 15. 151, Ar. Ran. 164.”¹¹⁶

And so, as A. T. Robertson states, that while χαίρειν in the New Testament is usually reserved for salutations, it is also used for farewells, as in II Cor. 13:11.

Additionally, the very same word, inflected, exactly the same way, can also mean for one “to rejoice” (e.g. Rom. 12:15). So, as with any homonym, context is the only way to determine how the word is being used.

For example, in English one might say, “The project foreman of the high rise twisted his **foot** near the **foot** of the stairway, as he carefully re-measured the floor beam, **foot** by **foot**, so as to make sure he would not have to **foot** another bill for a steel beam manufactured wrongly.” Obviously, just because “foot” is spelled the same way in all four usages in this sentence does not mean it means the same thing. Etymology does not solely determine the meaning of a word. Foot has four different meanings in that verse, which must be determined by the context. In the same way, just because χαίρειν means “greeting” in James 1:1, does not,

¹¹⁵ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 6 (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1960) pg. 254-255

¹¹⁶ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Seventh Edition (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1883) pg. 1706

necessarily mean that χαίρειν must mean greeting in II John 1:10. The same word can have different meanings depending on how it is used in the context of the passage. The Greek word χαίρειν can mean, *welcome*, or it can mean, *farewell*. Context must determine which.

Therefore, since it would be normal to give a farewell to those who name the name of Christ, as practiced, for example, by Paul in this verse—”Finally, brethren, **farewell** (χαίρειν). Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you (II Cor. 13:11 NKJV)”—what it seems the apostle John was addressing was if someone claiming to be a Christian entered into the Church and rose up and spoke during an open Assembly time, and that person went beyond the doctrine of Christ, thereby, revealing his true character as a heretic, John is then saying to not only refuse him hospitality, do not even give him a *Godspeed* or *farewell* as he departs!

Thus, John is not speaking about giving a salutation to a stranger, for these false teachers are not even known to be false at first, which explains why he calls them “deceivers” (vs. 7). So John could not be saying that if a stranger comes into your Assembly, do not even say “welcome” to him (for again, if he is a stranger, then, more than likely, the true nature of his teaching is not yet known). The entire context suggests that John is talking about persons, who will most certainly come into their midst, but who are not yet known to be false when they are first met. Then the context suggests that in some way their true identity is revealed before it would be customary to offer them hospitality and before it would become customary to say a farewell. So with this understanding before us, let us continue.

This now brings us to the last verse of this portion of the text. John says to not do this—”For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (II John 1:11 KJV). In this verse he switches back to a singular inflected verb when explaining why such a *farewell* or *Godspeed* is harmful; it makes the one so bidding a partaker of his evil deeds, knowing that he has been revealed in some way to be a heretic.

But before we proceed with this last verse, I should mention that I have attempted to provide a suggested background to John’s warning in these verses. However, since John does not say directly, “If there come any unto your **gathering**,” or “If there come any unto your **Assembly**,” he still could be talking in a general sense, meaning if any one comes into your presence, etc. As such, we should not be dogmatic in our scenario,

but offer it as a suggestion. We must always be careful to not exceed what is written and then proclaim it has a certainty.

So if John is talking in general terms, then, perhaps, modern versions are correct and *χαίρειν* should be understood as *greeting*. In that case, somehow, it is known beforehand that the person walking up to you is a heretic and you should not offer him a “greeting.” In any case, for those who see this as a greeting, they should be consistent in their application of this warning and not give a greeting to anyone who falls into this category of evil. Moreover, even if one sees it as a greeting and not as a farewell, it still does not change the implications of the next verse (vs. 11). So with that being said, let us now look to this verse.

This verse 11 is the key verse that is used by so many brethren to exclude other brethren from the Lord’s Table, and is the key verse that is used by many brethren to exclude entire Assemblies from fellowship. And it is the verse used by our brother Darby to justify his excommunication of so many Christians. And so it is important for us to understand this verse precisely.

In order to understand the ramifications of this verse (and how it was used by our brother Darby to justify his actions) let us provide a few comments from our brother Darby, himself, and then Hamilton Smith’s affirmation of the same. (Portions in brackets are my comments included to clarify what our brother is saying.)

Our brother Darby said this:

“Whatever associates itself with evil, be it three or three thousand or three million, is on the same ground... This is the whole question. **B[ethesda] is partaker thus in the guilt in question**, if another gathering is in communion with it, receive from it as it is, goes to it, they are one: [meaning Bethesda and the other gathering or Assembly in fellowship with it are equally guilty] if fifty do it, they are one. I cannot own them as Assemblies of God as a guarantee for integrity in one coming from them.”¹¹⁷

“I have no unkindly feeling against B[ethesda] as such, but I am bound, surrounded by a form of godliness denying the power, to keep myself pure. Is a gathering in the unity of the Spirit faithful in its testimony to Christ and the holiness of Christ’s claim upon it? I desire the largest, fullest charity to every

¹¹⁷ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 268-269

member of Christ's body, but it is not charity to acquiesce in sin in their walk, but the contrary. I must keep my own walk pure and faithful to Christ.”¹¹⁸

“The question is not whether they are logically in precisely the same position as the blasphemers, but whether their position justifies their not being received to communion. They are not according to scripture “a new lump,” if they acquiesce in evil in their midst, not clear of the committed sin. So jealous is the apostle as to the truth, **that a simple friendly adieu makes a man partaker of his evil deeds...**”¹¹⁹

And then Hamilton Smith says this:

“Our first enquiry must be, What was the origin of the Open Brethren? In 1847 it came to light that a Mr. B. W. Newton of Plymouth was teaching doctrines concerning the Person of Christ of such heretical character that they undermined the foundations of our faith. When it became clear that Mr. Newton maintained his evil doctrines, in spite of all remonstrance, many who had been associated with him at Plymouth separated from him and the meeting he attended at Compton Street. A considerable number of persons, however, adhered to him, though, at the same time putting forth a declaration that they did not hold his false doctrine.

The question then arose, could Assemblies of the Lord's people in other places receive a person coming from those who met with Mr. Newton at Plymouth? In the light of 2 John 7-11 it was felt by brothers of spiritual judgment that those in association with Mr. Newton, even though they refused his doctrine, were, according to Scripture, “partakers of his evil deeds,” and therefore could not be received until they had cleared themselves from their wrong associations...”

In turning to Scripture let us keep clearly before our minds the question at issue. Does association with a teacher known to teach false doctrine defile; or must the false doctrine first be imbibed before defilement is contracted? In 2 John: 10 and 11, we read, “If there come any to you, and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” This passage clearly contemplates two persons; one holding false doctrine as to the Person of Christ, the other a person who wishes him God speed. The passage does not say, or imply, that this second person holds the false doctrine, but that he identifies himself, by an act of fellowship, with the man that does, and, so doing, God calls this person “a partaker of his evil deeds.” **If then God calls this man a partaker of evil deeds, he is surely a defiled man, and that, not because he has imbibed the evil doctrine but because he is knowingly associated with a man that holds the false doctrine...**”

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pg. 302

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 267

Again we find this principle of the Open Brethren contradicted by 1 Cor. 5:6, in the case of defilement by association with an evil doer. In this passage the Corinthian Assembly is warned that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Does this mean that the Corinthian saints having remained in association with a man known to be incestuous had therefore all become incestuous? This indeed would be truly absurd. The clear meaning is surely that having remained in association with an incestuous man they had thereby become defiled. In like manner as we have seen, association with one holding evil doctrine caused defilement. It was not necessary for the Corinthians to commit incest to contract defilement, nor for evil doctrine to be imbibed in order to be defiled. See also Gal. 5:7-9. In both cases it was the deliberate association with known evil that defiled...”¹²⁰

So we see that our brother Darby and our brother Hamilton Smith both believe that one who is completely sound in the Faith, not holding any heresy, but who receives a Christian into communion, who is also sound in the Faith, rejecting the heresy taught by one who goes beyond the doctrine of Christ, but, at the same time, remains in fellowship with such a one, or even gives such a one a greeting or a farewell should all be excommunicated.

So they consider all these to be excommunicated—**1)** Christians who are sound in the Faith and not in association with the blasphemer, **2)** Those who receive another sound Christian, who is also sound in the Faith, but who, nevertheless, stays in fellowship with blasphemer, and **3)** The blasphemer himself. They consider all to be excommunicated because they perceive they have all become partakers of evil. Our brother Darby said: “The question is not whether they are logically in precisely the same position as the blasphemers, but whether their position justifies their not being received to communion. They are not according to scripture “a new lump,” if they acquiesce in evil in their midst, not clear of the committed sin. So jealous is the apostle as to the truth, **that a simple friendly adieu makes a man partaker of his evil deeds...**”¹²¹

And Hamilton Smith said, “The question then arose, could Assemblies of the Lord's people in other places receive a person coming from those who met with Mr. Newton at Plymouth? In the light of 2 John 7-11 it was felt by brothers of spiritual judgment that those in association with Mr. Newton, even though they refused his doctrine, were, according to Scripture, “partakers of his evil deeds,” and therefore could not be

¹²⁰ www.stempublishing.com/authors/smith/OPENBRET.html accessed 1-19-18

¹²¹ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 267

received until they had cleared themselves from their wrong associations...¹²²

They both consider that this verse, II John 1:11, requires excommunication of not only the one who goes beyond the doctrine of Christ (of which all would agree), but also the one who continues to associate with the one so doing, even though he or she has never embraced the same evil or false doctrine of heresy. They both are so dogmatic on this point that they have excommunicate such ones, including any Assembly which allows such ones in their midst. Thus they have openly encouraged division within the body of Christ, by their decision that such associations bring defilement into the body of Christ, bringing evil into the Assembly and, thus turning the new lump into leavened bread, which, in turn, on that point alone, requires excommunication.

Wholesale heartache and division, as one brother once said, has been created by our brother Darby and those who agree with him, because they state, unequivocally, that Scripture demands equal excommunication of anyone in your Assembly who is not heretical himself, but who is on friendly terms with one who is, even by giving a friendly adieu or greeting. And not only that, they also believe Scripture carries it one step further. If anyone remains in that Assembly, even though they disagree with his or her Assembly's decision to not excommunicate that sound in the Faith Christian who is remaining in contact with the heretic, they must not be received either, if, for instance, they come to visit another Assembly. They too must be considered excommunicated. And then they take it a step further again. They believe the wholesale excommunication of that entire Assembly must occur.

So they consider the heretic under excommunication (rightly so), and they consider the non-heretical Christian who, nonetheless, remains in contact with the heretic, excommunicated, and they consider the Assembly that receives that non-heretical Christian who still remains in contact, excommunicated, and they consider every sound Christian in that Assembly, who agrees to receive that Christian, excommunicated, and, finally, they consider any Christian in the Assembly who actually agrees with our brother Darby's view and Hamilton Smith's view regarding the error of their Assembly in receiving such a Christian, but, who, nonetheless do not feel the Lord wants them to leave their

¹²² www.stempublishing.com/authors/smith/OPENBRET.html accessed 1-19-18

Assembly, excommunicated! All these fall under their judgment of excommunication.

All this is done for the sake of their view of purity. Our brother Darby says, "I desire the largest, fullest charity to every member of Christ's body, but it is not charity to acquiesce in sin in their walk, but the contrary. **I must keep my own walk pure and faithful to Christ.**"¹²³

And he says this must be done because any evil that is not judged automatically leavens the whole lump, the lump becoming defiled. He states: "The question is not whether they are logically in precisely the same position as the blasphemers, but whether their position justifies their not being received to communion. They are not according to scripture "a new lump," if they acquiesce in evil in their midst, not clear of the committed sin."¹²⁴ And Hamilton Smith stated: "In like manner as we have seen, association with one holding evil doctrine caused defilement. It was not necessary for the Corinthians to commit incest to contract defilement, or for evil doctrine to be imbibed in order to be defiled. See also Gal. 5:7-9. In both cases it was the deliberate association with known evil that defiled..."¹²⁵

So, as we continue with our examination of II John 1: 9-11, let us keep clearly before our minds this question that is at issue. Does association with a teacher known to teach false doctrine defile the believer to the point requiring excommunication; or must the false doctrine first be imbibed by the believer before a defilement occurs which requires excommunication? For if such a sin of association does not require excommunication according to Scripture, then link in the chain is broken, and so those other Christians and those other Assemblies cannot be considered to be under excommunication.

But before we proceed, we must first mention that unless we remember the importance of maintaining a literal hermeneutic, there will be no agreement upon this point, for each party will come with a set of presuppositions that are based upon logic and not the actual words written by the Holy Spirit. As we said just a few pages earlier regarding a literal hermeneutic as shown by John 21:21-23: "God's Word is the most precise book in the world, for it is perfect in every way. Everything

¹²³ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 302

¹²⁴ Ibid., pg. 267

¹²⁵ www.stempublishing.com/authors/smith/OPENBRET.html accessed 1-19-18

means exactly what it says. It does not say too little, or say too much. It says just the right amount. If it seems to us to say too little, we must be careful not to add our thought or conclusions to it. Conversely, if it seems to say too much, we must be careful to dilute it or subtract from it to better fit in with our preconceived ideas.”

So with that in mind, let us pray to the Lord that we will be able follow the exact wording of these important verses regarding discipline in the Church and seek His wisdom and guidance in not approaching it with preconceived ideas.

Let us begin by providing the portion of Scripture in question again, first the King James Version, and then our brother Darby’s version.

II John 1:7-11 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. ⁸ Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. ⁹ Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹ For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. **KJV**

II John 1:7-11 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, they who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh -- this is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ See to yourselves, that we may not lose what we have wrought, but may receive full wages. ⁹ Whosoever goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of the Christ has not God. He that abides in the doctrine, he has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If any one come to you and bring not this doctrine, do not receive him into *the* house, and greet him not; ¹¹ for he who greets him partakes in his wicked works. Darby’s Version

Our brother Darby believed that any Christian who bids the person in verse 9 a God speed must be excommunicated. So, let us start there. The first question that must be asked is where does John declare that the one bidding him God speed or the one greeting him is to be excommunicated? Where does it say remove such a one from your midst, as our brother Darby purports? Where does it say that the one who disobeys this injunction and so says God speed must also not be received or have a greeting or farewell given to them either? (Let us not forget what the Holy Spirit said in John 21:21-23 about being precise in our hermeneutic and being very careful to not exceed what is actually written.) Where does this verse say this? John very clearly says who is to not be received, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine,

receive **him** not into your house, neither bid **him** God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

To demonstrate this, let us pretend John talks about this verse the same way he talked about John 21:21-23. Let us provide a similar response to this clear verse as was done by the brethren to the clear verse in John 21:22. If we begin with the same phrase that is found in John 21:23, along with brethren making a false assumption, like was done in John’s Gospel, this is how it would read:

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” *“Then went this saying abroad among the brethren,”* John said, “For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds **and so must not be received himself, but he must also be excommunicated.** Yet, he did not say he must not be received himself, but must also be excommunicated, but he said, “For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

Dear brethren, our brother Darby and those who agree with him are doing the same thing those early brethren did with the saying of Jesus. They are adding to Scripture, exceeding what is written with their dogmatic assertions. They are creating a new man-made tradition, if you will, just as was done by the Pharisees (along with their extreme zealousness). The only difference is those early brethren were not turning their logical conclusions about the longevity of the apostle John life into a non-biblical act which divides the body of Christ. They only turned their false conclusion into a false assumption or belief. But our brother Darby and those with him have turned their logical conclusions into more than a false thought, but into an actual non-biblical act, whereby there have been wholesale excommunications of all who might disagree with them regarding II John 1:9-11. Christians who are sound in the Faith have been cast out of the Church by a zealousness that exceeds the words of Holy Spirit.

Now they are doing these things for the purpose of keeping themselves free from evil, but by their false assertion that John is also demanding excommunication in II John 1:10-11 of those who receive or greet such a one, they are committing a different evil themselves and are allowing evil to remain unjudged in their own midst, which, if they were following their own conclusions would require the removal of themselves!

Adding to Scripture has always been considered wrong, a sin, an evil. Eve did so in the Old Testament, and so fell into sin (Gen. 3:3). In the New Testament, the Pharisees, routinely did so, adding to Scripture, thus invalidating the Word of God, making it say something it does not say, thus falling into sin and bringing the criticism of the Lord against them (Mark 7:1-13).

Scripture must never be added to with our own ideas or presuppositions. It is a temptation to us all. None of us are exempt from such a temptation, so we should keep that in mind and not be overly harsh on our brother Darby. But equally, we must be faithful to speak the truth in love (also being ready to judge ourselves if guilty of error or adding to Scripture). Adding to Scripture is a sin. Moses wrote, “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; **you shall not add to** nor take away from it” (Deut. 12:32 NASB). Agur the son of Jakeh wrote, “Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. **Add thou not unto his words**, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar (Prov. 30:5-6 Darby’s version). And yet, that is exactly what one is doing by claiming that II John 1:9-11 requires wholesale excommunications of Assemblies, who allow one to remain in their midst who is sound in the Faith, but who is spiritually immature by even giving a “friendly adieu,” as Darby said, to one who should not be given such a farewell. John never says this disobeying act of giving a greeting and/or farewell demands such a thing.

But some may say, “Well, we know John never says this *per se*, but by comparing II John 1:9-11 with I Cor. 5, we see that because of defilement from partaking of evil deeds, such defilement, as with the defilement or leaven in I Cor. 5, also requires such a one to not be received.” This is what Hamilton Smith declared when he said:

“In the light of 2 John 7-11 it was felt by brothers of spiritual judgment that those in association with Mr. Newton, **even though they refused his doctrine, were, according to Scripture, “partakers of his evil deeds,” and therefore could not be received until they had cleared themselves from their wrong associations...**”

If then God calls this man a partaker of evil deeds, he is surely a defiled man, and that, not because he has imbibed the evil doctrine but because he is knowingly associated with a man that holds the false doctrine...”

Again we find this principle of the Open Brethren contradicted by 1 Cor. 5:6, in the case of defilement by association with an evil doer. In this passage the Corinthian Assembly is warned that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.”¹²⁶

But again, where does I Cor. 5 demand excommunication of such defilement from association? It does not. This, too, is adding to Scripture making it say something it does not. Paul never said such a thing. If he did he would have written something like the following—“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ^{13b} Remove the wicked man from among yourselves” *and also anyone who gives such a one even a ‘friendly adieu,’ for such a one is a partaker of his evil deeds.*” (I Cor. 5:6-7, 13b—the italics, of course, are not a part of Scripture—he never said such a thing).

Paul never said (like Hamilton Smith claims) that anyone defiled by association must also be removed. But that is what one would be saying if they declare that I Cor. 5 is the basis for believing that II John 1:10-11 also requires removal of one associated with the one teaching error! Paul simply never said such a thing in his epistles and John never said such a thing in his epistles. In fact, there were still those in Corinth who did not go along with Paul’s decision about the brother he delivered to Satan, and yet Paul never said that because of that and their association with the evil, they too must be excommunicated (even if they are not committing the same evil but remain in association with the one who is).

This fact is found in II Cor. 2:6.

II Corinthians 2:6 Sufficient to such a man *is* this punishment, which *was inflicted of many*. KJV

II Corinthians 2:6 Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted **by the majority**. NASB

The Greek word translated as “of many,” or “the majority,” is the Greek word πολύς, inflected as a genitive plural (πλειόνων). This use of the articular adjective indicates that not everyone agreed with Paul’s decision of removal of the wicked person.

¹²⁶ www.stempublishing.com/authors/smith/OPENBRET.html accessed 1-19-18

Edward Robinson in his Greek Lexicon relates the following about this plural articular usage:

“Also *the many*, = *the most*, *the greater number*, but implying exceptions, Matt. 24.12 ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν πολλῶν, 2 Cor. 2.17 ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ *as the most do* i.e. the Judaizing teachers.”¹²⁷

The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges also speaks to this, stating:

“Which was inflicted of many. Literally, **by the majority**. Some, perhaps, may have declined to take part in it, for there were many, as the latter part of the Epistle plainly shews, who still refused to acknowledge St Paul’s authority.”¹²⁸

And *The New Testament for English Readers*, edited by Charles John Ellicott provides this:

“**Which was inflicted of many**—Actually, *by the majority*. The decision, then, had not been unanimous. The minority may have been either members of the Judaizing “Cephas” party, resenting what they would look upon as St. Paul’s dictation, and perhaps falling back on the Jewish casuistry, which taught that all the natural relationships of a proselyte were cancelled by his conversion; or the party of license, against whom the Apostle reasons in 1 Corinthians 6-8, and who boasted of their freedom...”¹²⁹

And, finally, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* states:

“That it was inflicted only by “the majority” (for so we must translate τῶν πλειόνων; see reff.) is sufficiently accounted for by remembering the presence of an anti-Pauline party at Corinth, who would not be likely to follow the Apostle’s instructions.”¹³⁰

And so we see that some in Corinth, who opposed Paul, did not agree with his decision of excommunication, and so, by definition, they would

¹²⁷ Edward Robinson, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, London, 1850) pg. 606

¹²⁸ J. J. S. Perowne, ed., *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (At the University Press, Cambridge, 1897) pg. 39

¹²⁹ Charles John Ellicott, ed., *A New Testament Commentary for English readers, Volume II* (Cassell, Petter & Galpin, London, 1878) pg. 367-368

¹³⁰ W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament, Vol. III* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1990) pg.48

still be in association with the wicked person, as was the case of the one in II John 1: 11, who gives a greeting to the known heretic.

Now, to be fair, it should be mentioned that some believe “the majority” meant everyone in the Church, but the one offending party, but that is highly unlikely for the rest of the First Epistle to the Corinthians speaks of those who opposed Paul, which opposition continues to the time of the Second Epistle. Additionally, it should also be mentioned that, while the adjective can also be used of all (e.g. Rom. 5:16, etc.), the context will usually indicate this, which it does not in our case. Contextually, from both of these epistles, Paul refers to those who oppose him.

For instance, in II Cor. 1:14 Paul reveals that not everyone in the Church acknowledged him. Only some of the Christians acknowledged him.

II Corinthians 1:14 As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also *are* ours in the day of the Lord Jesus. KJV

Jameson, Fausset and Brown speak to this fact, making the following comments about those who opposed Paul in the Church—

“But besides this, was the more pressing anxiety of the “care of all the churches.” At Corinth, as elsewhere, Judaizing emissaries wished to bind legal fetters of letter and form (cf. 3:3-18) on the freedom and catholicity of the Church. On the other hand, there were free thinkers who defended their immorality of practice by infidel theories (I Corinthians 15:12, 32-36)... Even then, whilst the majority at Corinth had testified their repentance, and, as St. Paul had desired, excommunicated the incestuous person, and contributed for the poor Christians of Judea, **there were still a minority who, more contemptuously than ever, resisted the apostle...**The widely different tone in different parts of the Epistle is due to the diversity which existed at Corinth **between the penitent majority and the refractory minority.**”¹³¹

Throughout his epistle he refers to this “refractory (rebellious) minority.” He reveals that such ones, apparently, were accusing him of walking according to the flesh.

II Corinthians 1:17 Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or that which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no *at the same time*? NASB

¹³¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset; David Brown, *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible Vol. II* (S. S. Scranton and Company, Hartford, 1875) pg. 299

And he refers to them again in II Cor. 5:12

II Corinthians 5:12 For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to *answer* them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. KJV

And he refers to the same minority who oppose him again in II Cor. 10:2. He calls them “some.”

II Corinthians 10:2 But I beseech *you*, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against **some**, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. KJV

And, then, finally in II Cor. 10:8-10 he shows that not only did they question his authority, they also mocked him.

II Corinthians 10:6-11 For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: ⁹ That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.¹⁰ For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible.¹¹ Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *will we be* also in deed when we are present. KJV

So while the adjective could be used of all, meaning the whole Church, minus the one being disciplined, it is highly unlikely. Why?—because the whole epistle is referring to those who had, and still were, opposing Paul and his authority. So, while the adjective can be used in other contexts of everyone in their entirety, obviously, Paul is using with the adjective in the sense of most everybody in the Church, but not all. Some opposed his authority regarding his decision to remove the one mentioned in I Cor. 5:1.

But notice that Paul did not command that those disagreeing with his decision, that *refractory* minority, should also be excommunicated because of their defilement caused by their continuing association with the brother who was removed, nor did he believe that every other Church in Asia must consider the entire Church in Corinth excommunicated, because the rest of that Church, i.e. the majority, still allowed that *refractory* minority to remain in the Assembly, which would mean they too became defiled by association of the ones still in association with the offending brother. We know this because Paul included in his epistle those greetings from the Churches in Asia, which Paul would never do, if

the sin of association should also be considered an excommunicable offense of evil.

I Corinthians 16:19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. NASB

But if our brother Darby had lived at that time, that is exactly what he would have done, that is, if he was being consistent in what he taught and practiced in the 19th century!

The fact remains that Scripture does not command that continuing association with one who is sinning also requires excommunication. If the one, who is guilty of such a thing, commits the same evil deed, then, yes, that person must then be excommunicated. But if not, he is guilty of sin, no doubt, and is guilty of being carnal, immature, and naïve. But to say that such a one should also be removed is adding to Scripture and exceeding the commands of the Holy Spirit. Scripture says, “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (I Cor. 5: 13b—Darby’s Version). Scripture does not say, “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves *and anyone who remains in association with such a one, and anyone who remains in association with those remaining in association with such a one, or with anyone who gives any of those, even a friendly adieu!*”

For if that was really true regarding the sin of association, then our brother Darby would have had to exclude the apostle Paul and put him out of the Church, for while he, of course, was free of the wickedness in question, he still gave a greeting and friendly adieu to those, who in our brother Darby’s mind, were partakers of evil by their association and acquiescence (II Cor. 1:1-2; 13:14).

So we see one cannot appeal to I Cor. 5 either, to support one’s belief that II John 1:10-11 requires excommunication by association.

Moreover, our brother Darby not only misinterprets II John 1:10-11, by his adding to that Scripture, making it require something it does not require, we also saw he also misinterpreted I Cor. 5:7, also making it require that which it does not require, and he adds to Scripture when he states that association with any Assembly, that is not considered to be a new lump, is an act that shows disregard for the truth, and makes anyone

giving a greeting to one in that Assembly, even one who is not guilty of any of the evil in question, also a partaker of that evil.¹³²

The apostle Paul never wrote such instructions, or required such separation from an Assembly which is no longer considered a new lump. Scripture never commands such a thing. Our brother Darby is exceeding what is written, which is a wrong in itself! Remember this is what our brother taught:

“I desire the largest, fullest charity to every member of Christ's body, but it is not charity **to acquiesce in sin in their walk**, but the contrary. **I must keep my own walk pure and faithful to Christ.**”¹³³

The question is not whether they are logically in precisely the same position as the blasphemers, **but whether their position justifies their not being received to communion. They are not according to scripture ‘a new lump,’ if they acquiesce in evil in their midst**, not clear of the committed sin. So jealous is the apostle as to the truth, **that a simple friendly adieu makes a man partaker of his evil deeds**, how much more a willful, determined reception of them into communion...”¹³⁴

He states that because an Assembly receives one in their midst, who, while not being a blasphemer or heretic themselves, yet is in association with someone who is, that Assembly can no longer be considered a new lump by receiving such a one, and so cannot be received to communion themselves (which, obviously, in his mind includes reception at the Lord's Table). Indeed, he even extends such refusal of fellowship to include sitting down and saying grace with such a one outside the Church meeting at a meal.

“I do not the least confine discipline to the Table; where persons deliberately take up the loose principle, I have nothing to say to them in divine things anywhere—could not say grace at table with them, and am of course blamed for exclusiveness.”¹³⁵

¹³² Please see again pages 246-250 above in our chapter that is entitled, Societal Sins— I Corinthians 5:1-13.

¹³³ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D.*, Vol. II, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 302

¹³⁴ Ibid., pg. 267

¹³⁵ Ibid., pg. 268-269

And so, our brother Darby has declared that any Assembly that is no longer a “new lump,” should be refused participation at the Lord’s Table, even at a common meal outside the Church.

But, by his standard, one needs to realize that he would have had to reject many Churches in the New Testament that were never rejected by the apostles. For example, the Church in Jerusalem would have had to be rejected, and he would even have had to forbid Peter, James, and John from partaking of the Lord’s Table, if they were to come into his own Assembly! Imagine that!

We must remember that in Acts 15 and in Gal. 2 false brethren were allowed to remain in the Church in Jerusalem, and, perhaps in other Churches in Judea in association with Jerusalem.

False brethren went out from Jerusalem and, apparently, from other Churches in Judea, and traveled to the Church in Antioch where they insisted that one could not be saved unless one was circumcised, and unless one kept the Law of Moses. Now it should be noted that these brethren were believers in Christ, for if they were not, the Church of Antioch, let alone Paul and Barnabas, would never have paid any attention to them, nor even believed that an assertion made them would ever need to be adjudicated by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem in a Church Council.

We must not forget that the Church in Jerusalem, for a long time, had problems with a certain party within the Church that was very legalistic, and which sought to impose that legalism on every other saint. And, not only that they sought hegemony over the Gentile Churches with Jerusalem as the mother Church. If one remembers, it was this party that first took issue with Peter for going to Gentiles, and then, to actually sit down and eat with them.

Acts 11:1-3 Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, ³ saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” NASB

Now, it is true that once they heard the full story from Peter they changed their mind and abandoned their dispute with him, but a certain legalistic mindset continued in the Church through some in that party, wherein they next sought to control those new Gentile converts,

demanding that they observe the Law of Moses and submit to their understanding of truth.

In Galatians 2:12, Paul calls them the party of the circumcision, who once more opposed Peter for eating with Gentiles. (And so, apparently, not everyone who disputed with Peter in Acts 11:1-3 agreed with Peter's account that the Holy Spirit allowed Jewish believers to eat with Gentiles in the places where they were, or some of those, who first agreed, had later changed their minds back to their original position, or some of their party were never present in that first encounter in Acts 11:1-3 with Peter, and so never agreed with the conclusion made on their behalf by others in their party. The point is that some in the Church in Jerusalem still held to this false teaching and mindset)

Galatians 2:12-19 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, **fearing the party of the circumcision.** ¹³ And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.¹⁴ **But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel,** I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it* that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" ¹⁵ "We *are* Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles;" ¹⁶ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. ¹⁷ "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!" ¹⁸ "For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, **I prove myself to be a transgressor.**" ¹⁹ "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. NASB

Of course, Paul considered those from this party in the Church in Jerusalem (and/or from Churches in Judea), and any who followed their false teachings, to be "transgressors," i.e. those who were not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel (see Gal. 2:12, 18). Would not their false teaching be a definition of evil by our brother Darby?

Then, finally, we see some from this same party also opposing both Paul and Barnabas in Antioch, which led up to the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15.

Acts 15:1-6 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved ² When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension

and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. ³ And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. ⁴ And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. ⁶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. KJV

These brethren in Jerusalem, and, perhaps in other Assemblies in Judea, caused many problems. They were legalistic Christians, who puffed themselves up as spokesmen for God, and for what they considered the truth, yet, in reality, was the opposite of the truth. They were not being straightforward with the truth of the Gospel, and so were nothing but carnal Christians seeking the accolades, respect, and submission of their fellow believers to their point of view. And so Paul calls them “false brethren,” not that they were not really brethren in the Lord, but they were brethren who were “false” in what they taught and how they lived. Luke shows us that they were Christians of the sect of the Pharisees, for he specifically says that they believed.

Acts 15:5 But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees **who had believed**, stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.” NASB

Now, obviously, these brethren of the sect of the Pharisees were sinning, for not only did they oppose Paul, who was an apostle of Christ, they also opposed the Gospel he was preaching. This was sinful or evil, in and of itself, because, by opposing Paul and the Gospel he preached, they were actually opposing the Lord Jesus Christ (who made Paul an apostle), and were opposing the Gospel which our Lord directly gave Paul to preach! Remember what Paul declared in Gal. 1:6-8 and in Gal. 1:11-12.

Galatians 1:6-8, 11-12 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is *really* not another; only **there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.** ⁸ But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ¹¹ For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man,

nor was I taught it, **but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**
NASB ¹³⁶

So, if according to our brother Darby an Assembly is not “according to scripture a “new lump,” if they acquiesce to evil in their midst, would that not mean the Church of Jerusalem would no longer be considered a “new lump by Darby, for these believers were never excommunicated from the Church?”

Now, I realize some would claim these brethren were not really Christians, despite the fact that Scripture says they believed. But if that was true, it really would not make any difference to the topic at hand, i.e. in regard to evil leaven, the loss of being a new lump, and our brother Darby’s theory of separation from that evil, for the question would then have to be asked as to why Peter, James and John would allow the evil of “unbelievers” to remain in the Church!

¹³⁶ The word “accursed” (anathema) in this passage (vs. 8) does not mean eternally cursed in hell. The word in this context means to be made “ineffective,” “no longer devoted to the Lord.” It is used as such in the LXX in Joshua 6:18. We are not being told that Israel was to be cursed to hell, but rather that they would be made ineffective in God’s eyes if they did not observe the ban. They would be under the disapproval of God and as such would not be useful in His service. This is, of course, what happened when Achan brought the anathema upon Israel, by keeping the beautiful mantle, the silver and gold. We also see this usage in I Cor. 16:22. Paul is not saying let anyone, who is not now loving the Lord (the Greek verb is in the present tense), be cursed in hell. Paul would never do that. His whole desire of his heart was that men be saved. The love of Christ constrained him to desire the salvation and well-being of every soul, even to their last breath. What Paul is saying is let everyone who does not continually love the Lord (this brings out the full force of the Greek present tense), be kept “ineffective” in the service of God. Paul is referring to Christians who are not leading a holy life of obedience to the commands of Christ, which, of course, was the problem in Corinth. Paul prays that they not have much influence among the other believers. And so in the same way, as in the passage before us, Paul prays that the false brethren in Galatia may no longer be useful in the work of God so that others may escape the error of their teaching and practice. (This same word is also used of Paul, himself, in Rom. 9:3. He is not praying that he would be willing to be eternally cursed in hell, but rather that he would be willing to be *set on the shelf*, so to speak, to no longer be useful to Christ, to forego any rewards at the judgment seat of Christ, if it meant his fellow kinsmen could be saved. In other words, he was willing to be a “nobody,” if it resulted in the salvation of Israel.

If Peter was able to discern the true character of one like a Simon Magus (Acts 8:20-23) he certainly could have discerned as to whether these men were really believers or not. Besides, if they were not really believers, why would Peter in Antioch care what they said, and why would the apostles and elders in Jerusalem allow them a place in the Church Council that took place in Jerusalem. Obviously, they would not.

So, either way one looks at it (whether they were Christians or whether they were not), the fact remains they were opposing Christ and were not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, which, in Darby's mind, would qualify as evil leaven.

If he regarded Benjamin Newton's teaching regarding the Person of Christ to be a grave evil, he most certainly would have regarded those who opposed Paul and the Gospel he preached to be a grave evil, for it opposed the Gospel given directly to Paul by Christ Jesus Himself. Most assuredly, if these brethren were filled with the Holy Spirit, they would have certainly recognized the truth of Paul's Gospel, and the veracity of his apostleship, for it was Christ Jesus who gifted him, and it was the Holy Spirit who set him apart to the work that he was called to do (along with Barnabas).

Now, of course, we know that these brethren were severely rebuked by Peter for tempting God with their false mindset and teaching as seen in Acts 15:10!

Acts 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? KJV

But the question before us is not whether their assertion was true or not, but the point is why were they still being allowed to remain in the Church in Jerusalem, that is, if one believes our brother Darby's interpretation of what type of evil demands excommunication, and then, if such ones were not excommunicated, what action should be taken by other Christians and/or Assemblies. (Some from this party may have even still been in the Church many years later, for we see James worried about what some brethren might think when they heard that Paul was in their midst, as recounted in Acts 21:18-25).

If our brother Darby, with the Assembly in London, excommunicated the Assembly in Peckham for an evil in his mind that simply consisted of changing their meeting place without the fellowship and approval of the

London Central Meeting, and also excommunicated the Assembly in Sheffield for allowing one from that Assembly to subsequently break bread with them, he and those with him certainly would have considered what this group of brethren did and taught to be an evil much greater than what he considered to be the evil of Peckham and Sheffield. So if he rejected Peckham and Sheffield (and before them Bethesda), he most certainly would have rejected Jerusalem, as well as the apostles Peter, James and John for allowing those with that evil to remain in the Church!

Remember this was his judgment regarding the Assembly in Peckham and Sheffield.

“The Assembly in [London] have weighed, and I with them, the case, and counted him as either excommunicated or in schism. I put the two cases, for I only speak of the principle. I take part in this act, **and hold him to be outside the Church of God on earth, being outside (in either case) what represents it in [London];** I am bound by Scripture to count him so. I come to [Sheffield]; **there he breaks bread, and is—in what? Not in the Church of God on earth,** for he is out of it in [London], and there are not two churches on earth, cannot be, so as to be in one and out of another. How can I refuse to eat with him in [London] and break bread with him in [Sheffield], have one conscience for [London], and another conscience for [Sheffield]; believe the Spirit judges one way at [London], and another for [Sheffield]. It is confusion and disorder.”¹³⁷

And then in another place, he made this judgment—

“Whatever associates itself with evil, be it three or three thousand or three million, is on the same ground... This is the whole question. B. is partaker thus in the guilt in question, if another gathering is in communion with it, receive from it as it is, goes to it, they are one: if fifty do it, they are one. **I cannot own them as Assemblies of God** as a guarantee for integrity in one coming from them.”¹³⁸

If sin is evil, and evil is leaven, then the Assembly in Jerusalem would be judged by Darby to be filled with the evil of leaven, making the whole lump leavened, and so, no longer a new lump, which meant anyone from that Church, and anyone from a different Church which remained in

¹³⁷ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 257 (All names in brackets have been supplied to bring continuity; in the second edition of letters the names were left blank, or as in the case of London, simply had the letter L.)

¹³⁸ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D., Vol. II*, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 268

fellowship with that Church, must never be received to the Lord's Table. Nor, could anyone go to that Church to break bread, or to any of those Churches still in association with them. Either way one looks at it, there would be evil in their midst and so Jerusalem would have to be rejected and, indeed, excommunicated if one follows our brother Darby's mindset and theory of separation from evil for the sake of maintaining purity and unity!

(We will discuss later the longsuffering forbearance and love of the Lord, and, indeed, of the apostles in dealing with what our brother Darby called evil in the Church. The apostles never compromised the truth, and never allowed evil to remain in the Church unjudged. They always would oppose it. But what our brother Darby did not realize is this—every Christian still has evil within, if they have not yet been glorified and fully conformed to the image of Christ. Sanctification is a lifelong process. If an Assembly is filled with Christians, evil will be present. Moreover, he did not realize that only certain sins, only certain forms of evil actually fall under the ban of immediate excommunication. But we will discuss this all as we continue in our examination of Church Discipline. The point that needs to be made at this time is that the apostles were righteous and holy in the way they were dealing with sin and evil in the Church. Our brother Darby was not. They had the wisdom and revelation from God in this matter. Our brother Darby did not. The apostles are the ones that we are told by the Holy Spirit to emulate, not our brother Darby. So whose example should we follow?)

As such, according to our brother Darby's principles of discipline and separation from evil, he would never would have been able to own the Church in Jerusalem as a new lump, and so he never would have gone to the Church, and he never would have sat down and eaten with Peter, James and John, or even ever give them a friendly adieu, that is, as long as they remained in, or remained associated with the Church in Jerusalem in its current condition.

He said it this way, in regard to these types of situation, when speaking of what he considered the evil of Bethesda—

"If a person comes from a gathering which has been connected with B[ethesda], I am entitled and bound to ask him, "Has it [meaning the other Assembly the person comes from] broken with it [meaning Bethesda]?" If not, have you broken with it? If the person says no, I ask "How comes that?" He may be ignorant, though it is very rare. I should say, "We cannot walk with that gathering [meaning the Assembly he comes from that has not broken with

Bethesda] because it is unfaithful. If he says he prefers going with it as it is [meaning his own Assembly], he judges himself, he is unclean [which in Darby's mind means he must also be considered excommunicated and not received].”¹³⁹

Beloved, the apostle Paul never acted in that way. He never adopted such a theory of “separation from evil,” and automatic excommunication for any who might not agree with him regarding which evil demands immediate excommunication and which evil requires a different type of discipline (as we will see as we continue our study). He told the brethren in Corinth to excommunicate the sinning brother in I Cor. 5, but he never told them to also excommunicate any who might disagree with the excommunication.

Nor, in any other epistles, do we have any instructions that anyone who is from Jerusalem should not be received into communion, because they belong to an Assembly which is allowing a specific form of evil to remain in their midst. In fact, we may have an example of the opposite, wherein someone from Jerusalem, is specifically received while such brethren from that original party still remained in Jerusalem (as we saw from the passage in Acts 21: 18-25). Paul writes the following to the Assembly in Colossae regarding Mark.

Colossians 4:10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: **if he come unto you, receive him;**) KJV

Now, we do not know if Mark still resided in Jerusalem, and so was still a part of that Church, or, if he did not reside in Jerusalem, if he still was associated with it; but if he was (which is very likely), here is an example where such a one in association with a Church that our brother Darby would view as not being a new lump, was, nevertheless, still received.

Can you imagine, Paul using the same type of questioning found in Darby's letter on the previous page in receiving Mark. This is how it would appear. He would tell those in Colossae that this is how I would handle it, and so this is how I wish you to handle it, if Mark ever comes to you for fellowship.

¹³⁹J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. D.*, Vol. II, 2nd edition (G. Morrish, London, 1914) pg. 264

“If Mark comes from a gathering which has been connected with Jerusalem, I am entitled and bound to ask him, as are you, “Has it [meaning the Assembly Mark comes from] broken with it [meaning Jerusalem]?” If not, have you broken with it? If Mark says no, I ask “How [come]?”...“We cannot walk with that gathering [meaning the Assembly Mark comes from that has not broken with Jerusalem] because it is unfaithful. If he says he prefers going with it as it is, he judges himself, he is unclean [which in Darby’s mind means he must also be considered excommunicated and not received].”

Paul never acted in such a way! Paul’s problem with Mark was not that he might have come from a Church that Paul no longer considered a new lump because it was still associated with Jerusalem. It was because Mark deserted them in the work, and so was considered unreliable (see Acts 15:38-39). In fact, if it was for the former reason, Paul would have never accepted Mark in the first place all those years earlier when he first went out with him and Barnabas, for if the presence of the evil of false teaching that was not straightforward regarding the truth of the Gospel, was an evil that required the entire Church in Jerusalem to be excommunicated (as the theory of our brother Darby required), then Paul would have never even received Mark in the first place all those years earlier (Acts 13:5; cf. 12:12). Why?—because that false teaching was just as prevalent in those early years (if not more so), as it was later when Paul wrote Col. 4:10. So Paul never instructed anyone to follow our brother Darby’s theory of “separation from evil,” as Darby interpreted it, and as he practiced it as a basis for Church unity.

Moreover, it does not matter if some say that those unknown commandments that Paul gave concerning the Church in Colossae about receiving Mark must have been similar to brother Darby’s question regarding one’s association with an Assembly under a ban, and then, if in response to that question, a person was still in association, that person must never be received. Why?—because Paul still commands them to receive him, regardless of those commandments he gave! He never makes Mark’s reception conditional. The Greek verb Paul uses (δέξασθε) is inflected as an imperative mood of command! The imperative mood in Greek is not conditional. And so, it has nothing to do with the commandments given to them regarding him. The two are not connected. If Paul was connecting them and there was a possibility of not receiving Mark, depending on his response to a similar questioning, he would have said something like this: “and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments, if he come unto you; if he answers

correctly, then receive him). There was no test to pass. Paul did not regard association with Jerusalem a disqualifier. How do we know this?—because Paul was already in association with Jerusalem, by passing out the decrees that were made by the apostles and elders with the Church (Acts 15:22-31; 16:4), a thing which Paul would never do if the Church was considered to be under a ban of excommunication because they were no longer a new lump by the presence of that evil leaven in the Church.

Do we see the difference? Paul not only did not act that way, he still went to the Church in Jerusalem and owned them as an Assembly of God years later (Acts 21:8-19). And he even gave them a greeting, which our brother Darby would say would make Paul a partaker of evil (Acts 19:21; 21: 17-19).

Does this mean that because Paul did what our brother Darby would not do, that our brother Darby would also oppose Paul, as the brethren from the sect of the Pharisees opposed him (albeit, granted, it would be for different reasons)? Or does it mean that since Paul greeted and went to the Church in Jerusalem, our brother Darby would also think it necessary to question Paul as he would have questioned one coming from any Assembly which had never broken with Bethesda, especially if Paul ever came to Darby's own Assembly. And if Paul would have responded the same way as Mark responded in our example above, would our brother Darby then, upon hearing that he did not break with Jerusalem, say to him, "We cannot walk with that gathering because is unfaithful. So if you say that you will not break with it as it is, you judge yourself, you are unclean [which in Darby's mind means Paul must also be considered excommunicated and not received]!

It most certainly seems Darby would do that very thing, if he was being consistent with his theory of separation from evil, for according to our brother Darby's viewpoint, that is, if he lived back then, he never would have even gone to Jerusalem for fellowship and to break bread with them, for all the same reasons he said he would never go to Bethesda, or even years later, to Peckham, or to Sheffield. And yet Paul had no problem going to Jerusalem and being associated with them!

Dear brethren, our brother Darby simply went too far in his judgments; he simply is wrong in his theory of separation from evil as a basis of unity. He tries to justify his theory by saying he is keeping himself pure. But he neglects to acknowledge that every sin in us, which of course

must be considered to be evil, or even any evil thought in us, defiles our purity. Any false judgment, any bit of spiritual pride, any false refusal to the Lord's Table, any wholesale excommunication of an Assembly, defiles purity.

It is not that our brother was wrong in seeking to keep himself pure. We should all seek to keep ourselves pure (I Tim. 5:22). But if we commit sin while seeking to keep ourselves pure, we are not keeping ourselves pure! And for one person to condone and to participate in the excommunication, wholesale, of another Assembly, is a person that is committing a sin and evil, in and of itself, which completely nullifies the desire to keep oneself pure, for it, itself, brings a defilement all of its own.

He says that he cannot own them as Assemblies because if he did that would be a great evil and that would be making Christ acquiesce in the sin and become a minister of sin! But what our brother does not realize is that "excluding" an Assembly of God, which has not been "excluded" by God himself, is a great evil itself, especially since he claims he is doing so in the name of the Lord and for the glory of the Lord.

I am afraid our brother sees the mote in his brethren's eyes but not the beam in his own eye! And, lest we become puffed up ourselves, we should know that more than likely we too, in things we do not yet know, also are seeing motes in our brethren's eyes, but not the beams in our own eyes. We all need the light, mercy and grace of our Lord. May God forgive us all!

Beloved, if our Lord exercised the same zeal exercised by our brother Darby and our brother Hamilton Smith, everybody would have to be removed from the Church and refused communion. Why? Because every Christian on earth is defiled with some evil, because no Christian can ever claim to be without sin (I John 1:10), and so, no Christian can ever claim to be pure in themselves, apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ. And, of course, since every Assembly is made up of individuals, every Assembly is in some way will be defiled by evil in their midst, if even by one evil thought in someone's heart, or by a hard feeling toward another brother, or, perhaps, a jealous thought toward another, or, perhaps, a false judgment, or a thought of contempt toward another.

Every Christian sins; every Christian has a heart that might think an evil thought, or manifest a condescending attitude toward another Christian,

and/or an evil feeling of jealousy, or a self-righteous judgment falsely made. As such, if one wishes to start assigning evil to other brethren, they must not forget to include themselves. If anyone wishes to charge other Christians with acquiescence of sin, they must not forget to charge themselves. The only one on earth that could never be assigned or charged with any evil at all was our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the true “new lump,” if you will, for he never sinned, or had any type of evil present within himself, or ever judged another unrighteously, or ever even had an evil thought. He never did. He was pure in every way. But we are all guilty of one or all of these at some time or other in our lives (our brother Darby included). The only ones that seemed to be impervious to accepting this truth, justifying themselves instead, were the Pharisees. They looked down on their fellow Israelites as defiled with evil, not knowing that they, themselves were filled with much evil, perhaps, not exactly the same type of evil that they judged, but evil nonetheless.

And this is where our brother misled so many saints. He would excommunicate entire Assemblies because of his perception that they were defiled by some evil in their midst, and yet he did not know that until he was glorified, he too was not free from defilement. Beloved all sin defiles and not one Christian is without sin.

Matthew 15:18-20 “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they **defile the man**.¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: ²⁰ **These are the things which defile a man**: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.” KJV

And so, since every single Christian, according to Scriptures, is defiled in some measure by some sin, or by some sin that is yet unknown to one’s heart, or some false witness against another Assembly, or by any type of self-righteous attitude, we can see that defilement, in and of itself, does not necessarily demand removal, or a refusal of fellowship at the Lord’s Table. Certain defilement by sin does demand individual excommunication as can be seen in I Cor. 5, but nowhere does defilement caused by a sin of association demand removal or excommunication from the Assembly.

So, let us now pause and review what John said to the Christians addressed in his epistle. What will the Christians do if they obey John? First, they will not receive one teaching heresy, nor give him a greeting or farewell. That is absolute. And, second, if one does give him a

greeting, such a one is disobeying Scripture, i.e. the apostle John's command to not give such a one a greeting, and so, through that disobedience, becomes a partaker of his evil deeds. In other words, such a Christian becomes guilty of the sin of disobedience and the sin of fellowshiping with one who is evil. This is a serious matter in and of itself.

But it should be noted that nowhere does Scripture then say that the one who ignores this admonition and gives such a one a greeting, should also not be received into one's house or be given a greeting or farewell himself. In other words, nowhere does it say that by disobeying this admonition, the Christian must then be treated with the same prohibitions that apply to the heretic, so that that one must now be treated just like the heretic! Those who try to apply the command of verse 10 to the person of verse 11 exceed what is written. John simply does not command such a thing.

I am sure that if any of those who do believe John is saying that would protest greatly if that same mindset was applied to one of their own personal contracts. For example, let's assume an Employee's Handbook in a major commercial bank had a paragraph in the manual that said this in regard to any personal loans taken out by an employee: "If a bank employee misses a payment for more than six consecutive months, such an employee will be considered in default and will be immediately dismissed. Moreover, if anyone in this bank remains in association with such an employee, they will be viewed as a partaker of their irresponsible actions."

Now, that being said, I am sure if such a thing happened and such a bank employee was dismissed for being in default, but some of his or her fellow bank employees remained in contact with him or her, and, shortly thereafter, they also received their own pink slips for being in association with that dismissed employee, they would immediately protest, saying, "You did not say, 'And if anyone in this bank remains in association with such an employee, they will be viewed as a partaker of their irresponsible actions *and so will be similarly dismissed.*' But you only said, 'And if anyone in this bank remains in association with such an employee, they will be viewed as a partaker of their irresponsible actions.'"

Moreover, if the employer would not rescind their decision upon the protest, I am sure if a union official or representative was brought in as an advocate for the fired employee, the union representative might say to the employer—"But that is not what the contract says, you are adding

your own words to an agreed contract. The contract we negotiated means exactly what it says, no more and no less! Now, granted, you would be justified in such action if you decided that should be your standard bank policy, and that was what was negotiated, but that was not what was said or agreed to. You never demanded that the phrase, “*and so will be similarly dismissed*” be added to the contract; it is unjust to dismiss an employee for simply continuing his or her associations with a rightly terminated employee in default. Now, we would agree with you, as the contract now reads, that you would certainly be justified in questioning that employee’s lack of judgment by their continuing association, or even their lack of fidelity! But bad judgment or lack of fidelity is not grounds for termination according to the contract we negotiated.”

Beloved, we are not arguing with the fact that if brethren act like nothing is wrong, and, therefore are continuing to greet one who continues in one of those sins requiring excommunication, are not themselves violating Scripture. They are; and, therefore, are indeed becoming partakers of that person’s evil deeds. That is not disputed. It is a serious matter that cannot be ignored or lightly glossed over. Why? Because by such a sin of disobedience and association with such a false teacher, **while not yet being a sin that requires separation or excommunication, could lead to a sin, which would require excommunication!** (For example, if such a one’s continued familiarity with a heretic through association, eventually caused that one to accept the very heresy, then that would also lead to their excommunication.) Any sin if allowed to remain in one’s heart (and giving a greeting or Godspeed to a known heretic is a sin!) will eventually harden one’s heart, for it grieves the Holy Spirit of God and can eventually lead to one of those sins listed in Scripture which do require excommunication, or, at the very least, it could lead to a charge of acting disorderly, which would require a form of discipline itself. (Please see once again on page 7, Fig. 1, *Summary Chart of Disciplinary Verses in Scripture*.) So this is no light matter! But the Holy Spirit never listed this type of naïve, false and immature toleration, as an additional sin requiring excommunication, in and of itself!

And so in conclusion, we should never forget that even though our brother Darby went too far, and even though those who are guilty of the sin of association (but not of the heresy itself) should never be excommunicated according to Scripture, **there is a real danger in associating with a known heretic**. Many times one will become what one tolerates. And because of this, such a Christian should be warned and

such a Christian should be admonished to refrain from receiving such a one into their house and/or giving them a greeting or farewell.

Personal Sins—Matthew 18:15-20

Matt. 18:15-22 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ “But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”¹⁷ “And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. (NKJV)¹⁹ “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.”²⁰ “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”²¹ Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. (NASB 1995)

As we mentioned before, it is very important for a Christian to maintain a proper hermeneutic in our study of Scripture. Without it, portions of Scripture are taken out of context, additions of our own human logic are added to it, and Scripture is forced to fit a preconceived idea. We are all subjected to this unfortunate ability to twist Scripture to say what we wish it to say, for our human nature inherited from our first parents has the innate ability to rationalize away truth so as to do or to believe what we will.

Eve was the first one to do this, or, if not her (since she was not yet created when God gave the command to not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), then Adam was the first one to do this, adding to the Word of God making it say something that was not said.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.”¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” KJV

Genesis 3:1-3 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?² And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:³ But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. KJV

Notice that Eve added the phrase, “neither shall ye touch it,” to the command of God. So, that command of God must have been added in

one of two ways. First, it may have been Adam who added the phrase “neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die,” to the Word of God, i.e. to God’s command in Gen. 2:17, thinking he would protect Eve from ever disobeying God, for one cannot obviously eat the fruit (which is what God actually commanded) if one does not ever touch it. Or, secondly, it may have been Eve who added to the command, thinking the same thing that if she does not touch it there is no way she will ever break the actual command of God not to eat it. In either case, for the sake of purity and obedience (a good thing, a good desire) something was added to God’s word (a bad thing, a bad decision). This became the first example of a man-made tradition being added to the Word of God. But, as with all man-made traditions, because it was something that God never said, it only led to error and sin.

Eve became convinced that if God said not to eat it which would entail touching the fruit, that God must have also meant to not even touch it. She rationalized away the truth of what God actually said by her logic, into it saying what she thought God must surely have meant, even if he did not actually say it. Her logic convinced her that if she even touched the fruit she would die, so that when she touched it and did not die, she must have thought that what God said was not true. This allowed the Serpent to lead her further astray, by question the veracity of God’s Word, and so by doubt actually take a bite of the fruit, which was a direct disobedience to God’s command, unlike simply touching it. Her deception began within herself by accepting an addition made to Scripture (either by herself or by Adam). This caused her up to accept the lie of Satan and fall into actual transgression (I Tim.2:14). This is what we inherited from our first parents and it is still within our fallen human nature. And so we all need the Spirit of Truth guiding our study of Scriptures to insure that we remain objective in our approach to the Word of God and not add to it in any way. In that light we have the Holy Spirit of God providing a few hermeneutical principles to help us in this endeavour.

These hermeneutical principles are sometimes given the acronym LGH. The first initial stands for Literal. We have already mentioned the literal hermeneutic in the last chapter, emphasizing the importance of accepting the plain and literal sense of Scripture unless the context warrants otherwise. This principle is revealed in John 21:21-23. “G” stands for Grammatical. This shows us it is important to understand the syntax and grammar of the text in order to properly understand what the text is saying. This principle is revealed in Gal. 3:16, where the Holy Spirit reveals that even the change in number from plural to singular is not

without significance. This helps explain our Lord's revelation that even the smallest jot and tittle is full of inspiration and revelation (Luke 16:17). And, finally, "H" stands for Historical. It is always important to understand the historical background of a text. Examples of this are given to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in such verses as Mark 7:3-4, where Mark provides the historical background to the ceremonial washing of one's hands to help the reader understand the Pharisees question about unwashed hands.

All three hermeneutical principles are important and help insure a proper understanding of what Scripture is saying. To these three, however, I would add a fourth, thus making the acronym into LGHC. The "C" would stand for the Comparative hermeneutic of Scripture revealed to us in I Cor. 2:13. This not only bespeaks the importance of comparing the New Testament with the Old Testament, it also bespeaks the importance of comparing verses of Scripture within the context of a chapter, book, and Testament. Thus, things in the Gospel should be compared with things in the Epistles of Paul, and things in the Epistles of Paul should be compared with things in the General Epistles of the New Testament, etc. As there can be no contradiction in Scripture, one verse should never be divorced from other portions of Scripture. They all fit together. Without these three principles of hermeneutics, and the fourth, sometimes a Christian might be led astray and adopt a practice or interpretation of Scripture that is not really consistent with the truth, but is rather a creation of our own understanding.

Consequently, as the Lord was always opposed to any false interpretations of Scripture fueled by traditions of men, and since we are told to imitate the Lord, walking as He walked (I Cor. 11:1; I John 2:6), we also should always be opposed to any tradition of man that nullifies God's Word, through additions, subtractions, logic, or an ignoring of these important hermeneutical principles. So with these important hermeneutical principles before us, let us look at the passage.

The opening phrase of this section of Scripture, which is, "Moreover if your brother sins against you," is an important phrase because it sets the context for the passage. This whole procedure that follows is instigated by a "sin." It is not instigated by hurt feelings, differences of opinion, but an actual sin. It cannot be matters pertaining to conscience and liberty, but only a sin. And it specifically says that it is a sin that is against someone. There are many types of sins in Scripture. Some sins are against God. Some are against ourselves, and some are against our

neighbor. (Of course, ultimately, every sin is against God!). Let me provide a few examples below.

Determining the Sins in Question

Sins against God

Exodus 32:33 And the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has **sinned against Me**, I will blot him out of My book. NASB

Deuteronomy 9:16 “And I looked, and behold, you had **sinned against the LORD your God**—had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. NKJV

Matthew 12:31-32 “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the **blasphemy against** the Spirit will not be forgiven men. ³² “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; **but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him**, either in this age or in the age to come. NKJV

Acts 5:1-4 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ² And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart **to lie to the Holy Spirit** and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ “While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” NKJV

Sins against Oneself

Numbers 16:38 “The censers of these men who **sinned against their own souls**, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel. NKJV

I Corinthians 6:18 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality **sins against his own body**. NKJV

Sins against a Neighbor

Leviticus 19:13 'You **shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him**. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. NASB

Leviticus 19:16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and **you are not to act against the life of your neighbor**; I am the LORD NASB

Leviticus 19:35-36 'You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. ³⁶ `You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. NASB

Deuteronomy 24:15 "You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he may not cry against you to the LORD and it **become sin in you**. NASB

1 Kings 8:31-32 "If a **man sins against his neighbor** and is made to take an oath, and he comes *and* takes an oath before Thine altar in this house, ³² then hear Thou in heaven and act and judge Thy servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness. NASB

I Corinthians 6:8 On the contrary, **you yourselves wrong and defraud**. *You do this even to your brethren*. NASB

This last verse tells us that one of the sins against our neighbor or brethren is that of cheating, lying to, or defrauding someone. The Old Testament gives us some examples where this sin may occur.

Exodus 22:5-6 "If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed *bare* and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. ⁶ "If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field *itself* is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution. NASB

Exodus 22:9-15 "For any kind of trespass, *whether it concerns* an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, *or* for any kind of lost thing which *another* claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; *and* whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. ¹⁰ "If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing *it*, ¹¹ "*then* an oath of the LORD shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept *that*, and he shall not make *it* good. ¹² "But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. ¹² "But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. ¹³ "If it is torn to pieces *by a beast*, *then* he shall bring it as evidence, *and* he shall not make good what was torn. ¹⁴ "And if a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not *being* with it, he shall surely make *it* good. ¹⁵ "If its owner *was* with it, he shall not make *it* good; if it *was* hired, it came for its hire. NKJV

Therefore, we must realize that in Matt. 18:15-20 passage, Jesus identifies what type of sins he is referring to—sins against our neighbor. He specifically says, “Moreover if your brother sins against you.” The Holy Spirit confirms this in the context by the follow-up question of Peter in Matt. 18: 21, and Jesus’ answer in verse 22.

Matthew 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft **shall my brother sin against me**, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. KJV

The same type of answer is also stated by our Lord in Luke 17:3-4.

Luke 17:3-4 “Take heed to yourselves. If your **brother sins against you**, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ “And if **he sins against you** seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” NKJV

So we see that this passage is not referring to every kind of sin. Obviously, it is not referring to sins against ourselves, unless that sin involves a third party, which, of course, the sin of immorality most certainly would. But if a sin against oneself did not directly involve another person, it would not be a sin referred to in this procedure revealed by our Lord. (Such sins not involving a third party might be sins such as self-cuttings, and/or tattoos (cf. Lev. 19:28).

Nor would it refer to sins against God, per se, although, as we mentioned before, all sins are ultimately against God, and certain sins against another are also against God (cf. Lev. 6:2-6; Num. 5:6-7; Ps. 51:4 with II Sam. 12:9, 13). But generally speaking it would not be referring to those sins directly against God such as found in the listing above (except possibly Acts 5:1-4 which involved a lie made also to men, although, the real lie was against God).

Consequently, in this command given to His disciples our Lord is primarily referring to those sins which we commit directly against another specific human being. This fact, gleaned from a literal hermeneutic (“if your brother sins **against you**”), will become more apparent as we continue and consider the text from a historical and grammatical hermeneutic also. Let’s continue.

Perhaps, it might be helpful to bring in the historical aspect of hermeneutics at this time, in just one aspect, for we will discuss the historical aspect in greater detail later. One must remember that Christ came to introduce a totally different way of behavior among his

disciples. Even the Jews believed that, when the Messiah would finally come, he would reinterpret the Law.

Alfred Edersheim bespeaks this in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus Christ the Messiah*. He states the following concerning the days of the Messiah.

“But this view must have been at least modified by the expectation, that the Messiah would give a new Law...Nay, opinion went even further, and many held that in Messianic days the distinctions of pure and impure, lawful and unlawful, as regarded food, would be abolished...And with a view to this new Law, which God would give to his world through the Messiah, the rabbis divided all time in to three periods: the primitive, that [time] under the Law [of Moses], and that of the Messiah.”¹⁴⁰

This, of course, was not some new idea. It was based upon Scripture. Moses, himself, said the time would come when God would speak anew through a Prophet like unto himself. In other words, just as Moses gave the Law, the Messiah would give his Law – the Law of Christ.

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 `I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. ¹⁹ `And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him. NKJV

Jesus, being this Prophet, fulfilled this prophecy of Moses by directing their hearts away from Moses and to Himself. In the Sermon of the Mount he directed their thoughts away from Moses by saying, “You have heard it has been said.” And then he would tell them, “But I say unto you.” The Lord was revealing His Law– the law of grace and love – the Law of Christ hidden in our heart. He continued this prophetic mission throughout his ministry, revealing the fullness of His standards or righteousness, as opposed to those standards given by Moses, which sometimes allowed certain things, all because of the hardness of their hearts (e.g. Matt. 19:8-9).

He spoke concerning the Ten Commandments. Moses said, “Thou shalt not kill.” The Lord said to not even have anger in your heart to your brethren. Moses said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Jesus said, “Even if you have lust in your heart you commit adultery.” And then later, The Lord Jesus would introduce his law concerning divorce as opposed to the Law of Moses (referred to above). He told his disciples,

¹⁴⁰ Edersheim, Alfred, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), Pg. 776

“Moses permitted you divorce, but I say whoever divorces his wife except for fornication commits adultery.”

As the Messiah, and as the prophesied Prophet who would come, our Lord dealt with “commandments” (Matt. 5-7). He dealt with “ceremonial” laws (Matt. 15:2-11). He dealt with certain “statutes,” like we already mentioned, the statute of divorce (Matt. 19:3-9), and now in Matt. 18:15-17 he is dealing with certain “judgments” contained in the Law of Moses. In that light, the Law of Moses says this regarding certain judgments, wherein a sin is committed against a neighbor.

Leviticus 19:15-17 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: *but* in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.¹⁶ Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people; neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I *am* the LORD.¹⁷ Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. `You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. KJV

Regarding this verse and the issue surrounding it, Matthew Henry provides a very helpful comment.

“If thy brother trespass against thee, by grieving thy soul...by affronting thee, or putting contempt or abuse upon thee, if he blemish thy good name by false reports or tale-bearing, if he encroach on thy rights, or be any way injurious to thee in thy estate; if he be guilty of any of those trespasses that are specified, Lev. 6. 2, 3. If he transgress the laws of justice, charity, or relative duties; these are trespasses against us, and often happen among Christ's disciples, and sometimes, for want of prudence, are of very mischievous consequence. Now observe what is the rule prescribed in this case. *Go, and tell him his fault between him and thee alone*...Let this be compared with, and explained by, Lev. 19. 17. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; that is, “ If thou hast conceived a displeasure at thy brother for any injury he hath done thee, do not suffer thy resentments to ripen into a secret malice, (like a wound, which is most dangerous when it bleeds inwardly,) but give vent to them in a mild and grave admonition, let them so spend themselves, and they will expire the sooner; do not go and rail against him behind his back, but thou shalt in any wise reprove him. If he has indeed done thee a considerable wrong, endeavour to make him sensible of it, but let the rebuke be private, between thee and him alone; if thou wouldst convince him, do not expose him, for that will but exasperate him, and make the reproof look like a revenge.” This agrees with Prov. 25. 8, 9. “Go not forth hastily to strive, but debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, argue it calmly and amicably; and if he shall hear thee, well and good, thou hast gained

thy brother, there is an end of the controversy, and it is a happy end; let no more be said of it, but let the falling out of friends be the renewing of friendship.”¹⁴¹

Then, if such matters were not resolved privately, Moses says in another portion of the Law that one is to then take it to the judges and/or to the priests.

Deuteronomy 17:8-12 “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses.⁹ “And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge *there* in those days, and inquire *of them*; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.¹⁰ “You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you.¹¹ “According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside *to* the right hand or *to* the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.¹² **“Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. NKJV**

Then, if the offending party refuses to heed the decision made by the priest or the judge, the Law of Moses stipulates that man shall die. That was the Law of Moses; but, in contradistinction to that procedure, it is as if Jesus is now saying to His disciples, “But among yourselves, it will not be this way”. And so, as with the commandment against killing and the commandment against committing adultery, the Lord is now giving his law, if you will, the Law of Christ, in contradistinction to what Moses said.

It is as if Jesus is saying, “You have been told that Moses says that when a brother sins against you and will not be reconciled, take it to the judges or to the priests, **but, I say to you,** ‘Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a

¹⁴¹ Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament, Vol. IV* (Robert Carter & Brothers, New York, 1856) pg. 174

publican.”¹⁴² This portion of Scripture is dealing with judgments and sins against a neighbour.

Therefore, we must be careful in the ways we utilize this passage. It is referring to situations where a personal affront has been done by one brother against another. The Lord clearly provides the context and parameters of the passage by beginning it with the phrase, “if your brother sins against you.” It does not concern doctrine. The procedures for false doctrine are found in such verses as II John 1:9-11 and Titus 3:5. (The significance of this will be dealt with at the end of the chapter.) Nor does it deal with disagreements of conscience or personal liberty. This portion in the Gospel of Matthew is dealing with personal sins, sins that are against a neighbor. It reveals Christ’s commandments regarding the way those issues are to be dealt with under the “New Testament,” in contradistinction to the “Old Testament,” just as it was with other issues.

So it is wrong to blindly mix up the procedures given to us regarding discipline in the Church. Each procedure should be clearly understood within its own context and parameters, and should not be blindly applied to other disciplines simply because one wants to claim the sanction of heaven in their decisions. This is why we must always pursue a literal hermeneutic. God says what He means, and, as has been said by others, He means exactly what He says, no more and no less. So with this important truth established let us continue our study.

In order to properly understand the rest of this portion of Scripture we must be careful to understand all the grammatical aspects of the text. Then we must apply the historical hermeneutic and then bring in the comparative hermeneutic. So let’s begin with all the grammatical aspects of this passage.

Grammatical Aspects of the Passage

The next two verses of this passage says,

¹⁴² It should be noted that since the Law of Moses was the law of the land, in Matt. 23:2-3, Jesus tells his disciples to continue to abide by the procedure of Deut. 17:8-12 when dealing with fellow Israelites. We are told to obey the laws of the land and submit to every human ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake (I Pet. 2:13-14; Rom. 13:1). In Israel the civil law of the land was the Law of Moses, so if one lived in Israel, he was told to obey the laws. However, in contradistinction to our dealings with unbelievers, we are told to follow the procedure of the Lord in Matt. 18:15-17 when dealing with fellow believers.

Matt. 18:16-17 ¹⁶ “But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that `by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ ¹⁷ “And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. NKJV

The key to help us understand what Jesus means by these next verses is the continuing focus on the individuals involved – the offended party and the offending party. Unlike Modern English, the Greek language lets the reader know whether one is referring to one individual or many individuals. It tells the reader if a personal pronoun is singular or plural. It lets the reader known if our Modern English pronoun “you” is referring to one person or many persons. This becomes instructive for in Matt. 18:15-25, unless, one has the King James Version, one probably does not see the interplay between the 2nd person singular personal pronoun in these verses and the 2nd person plural personal pronouns in verse 18 in their English version. But in the Greek, the Holy Spirit is switching back and forth between the singular and plural (See Fig. 3 below), which one does not see in Modern English Versions. This is most informative in our passage.

Fig. 3—An Analysis of the Change of the Personal Pronoun Σὺ in Matthew 18:15-22 from Plural to Singular

Matthew 18:15-22 Moreover if **thy** (σου- sing.) brother shall trespass against **thee** (σὺ - sing.), go and tell him his fault between **thee** (σου- sing.) and him alone: if he shall hear **thee** (σου- sing.), thou hast gained **thy** (σου- sing.) brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with **thee** (σου- sing.) one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee (σοι - sing.) as an heathen man and a publican. ¹⁸ Verily I say unto **you** (ὁμῖν - plural), Whatsoever **ye shall bind** (2nd per. pl. verb) on earth shall be [have been] bound in heaven: and whatsoever **ye shall loose** (2nd per. pl. verb) on earth shall be [have been] loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say unto **you** (ὁμῖν - plural), That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. ²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee (σοι - sing.), Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Modern English, as opposed to Early Modern English, does not distinguish between singular and plural second person personal pronouns. We use “you” for both singular and plural. However, the English of the King James Version (Early Modern English) still made a distinction between singular and plural personal pronouns (See Fig. 4 below). Therefore, if one uses the New King James Version or the New American Standard Version, which uses Modern English, one might misunderstand the application of this verse.

Fig. 4—Second Person Singular and Plural Personal Pronouns in King James Version

King James Version			Modern English Versions		
Case	Singular	Plural	Case	Singular	Plural
Subject (Nominative)	Thou	Ye	Subject (Nominative)	You	You
Possessive (Genitive)	Thy/ Thine	Your	Possessive (Genitive)	Your	Your
Object (Accusative or Dative)	Thee	You	Object (Accusative or Dative)	You	You

I must admit I once took the personal pronoun “you” in the last phrase of verse 17, “let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector,” as a plural pronoun and so understood it as referring to the Church as a whole. In other words, I understood it to read, “Let him be to you (the Church) like a heathen and a publican.”

However, a brother once mentioned that he understood the personal pronoun to be a singular “you,” and was referring to the offended party. I did not think so at the time (as I was reading the NASB), but it piqued my interest and when I looked at the underlying Greek text, indeed, it was a singular pronoun and not a plural pronoun. This is one of the advantages of reading the King James Version, for English at that time still made a distinction between the singular and plural personal pronouns as did the Greek language.

(It is interesting to note that within the milieu of Southern American English some will still make a distinction between the second person singular and plural personal pronouns by using, *y'all* (also spelled *you-all*) for the plural number of the second person personal pronoun and simply *you* for the singular. If we were to use this distinction in the text before us it would read more accurately in Modern English as follows (also using it in the plural inflected verb): “Moreover if **your** brother sins against **you**, go and tell him his fault between **you** and him alone. If he hears **you**, **you** have gained your brother.”¹⁶ “But if he will not hear, take with **you** one or two more, that `by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’¹⁷ “And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to **you** like a heathen and a tax collector.”¹⁸ “Assuredly, I say to **you-all**, whatever **you-all bind** on earth will be [have been] bound in heaven, and whatever **you-all loose** on earth will be [have been] loosed in heaven.”¹⁹ “Again I say to **you-all** that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.”²⁰ “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”²¹ Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to **you**, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Matt. 18:15-22 Adaption of NKJV)

Therefore, now that we understand that the Holy Spirit is switching back and forth between singular and plural pronouns, we can see that the second person personal pronoun in verse 17 is singular (referring to the person who was offended) and not plural (referring to the Church as a whole). Thus, when the Holy Spirit is telling us through Matthew (using the KJV): “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto **thee** (**singular—meaning the offended person**) as an heathen man and a publican, he is not saying, “let him be to **you** (**plural—meaning the Assembly**) like a heathen and a tax collector.” This is a very significant fact as we will shortly see.

The Holy Spirit did not inspire Matthew to use the plural personal pronoun (ὁμιῖν) in verse 17 as he does in the very next verse (vs. 18). If He did, there would be no argument as to whom the Lord was referring when He said “let him be to you.” In other words, if our Lord was referring to the Church as a whole, the Holy Spirit could have made this perfectly clear by inspiring Matthew to write: “let him be unto **you-all**

(ὁμῖν) as an heathen man and a publican.” But the fact of the matter He did not.¹⁴³

¹⁴³

Now some may argue that the reason he did not is that Matthew was using a collective singular pronoun in this verse. Let’s consider that possibility. A collective noun in Greek is similar to a collective noun in English. It is a noun which is singular in number, but, obviously is understood to contain a plurality. For example, in English collective singular nouns are words such as family, a class, audience, team, etc. So consider the example of family; in English we might say, “My family is always late for dinner.” The collective noun family is singular, even though we know a family is made up of more than one individual. But, since a family is treated as a whole, it is singular. Because of this, collective nouns are usually construed with singular verbs. However, sometimes a collective noun can also be construed with a plural verb, emphasizing the plural nature of the noun. For example, in writing to a sister in the Lord, the evangelist George Whitefield once wrote: “My Lady, your family **are** always upon my heart. My constant desire and prayer to God is that you all may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (George Whitefield, *Sketches of the Life and Labours of the Rev. George Whitefield* [John Johnstone, London, 1849] pg. 120) As one can see the same singular collective noun, family, is now construed with a plural verb (are) because the emphasis was on each individual member of the collective noun. (This sometimes also occurs in Greek—a collective noun is construed with a plural verb, e.g. Luke 6:19 NA28).

So, now that we understand the nature of collective nouns, we should also keep in mind that sometimes in Greek a second person personal pronoun might also be used as a collective noun, or should I say, a collective pronoun. In Matthew 11:23-24 we see a singular personal pronoun in verse 23 construe with what we may consider a collective noun that follows—the village of Capernaum. Thus, we might say Capernaum becomes the postcedent of the collective pronoun σὺ. But we should also notice that in verse 24 the same collective noun becomes the antecedent of a plural personal pronoun.

Let me provide the King James Version to show this change in number of the personal pronoun, remembering that “thou” and “thee” in Early English is plural, and “you” in Early English is plural—**Matthew 11:23-24** “And **thou** [singular], Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in **thee** [singular], had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”²⁴ But I say unto **you** [ὁμῖν plural], “That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for **thee** [singular].” KJV

As one can see, Matthew begins with a singular personal pronoun σὺ, “And **thou**, Capernaum,” but then switches to a plural personal pronoun, “But I say unto **you** [ὁμῖν],” referring to the same collective noun. But then notice that he then concludes that sentence by reverting back to the singular personal pronoun, **thee**, using it as a collective pronoun. This is why, perhaps, some might think Matthew is using a collective pronoun in Matt. 18:17 as he was in Matt. 11:23-24. But there is a difference between these two portions of

Secondly, once the identity of the second person personal pronoun is established, normal grammatical rules require the same identity to be understood throughout the flow of the text unless a switch is clearly made. This does not happen in Matt. 18:15-17 as can be seen if we read it once more in context.

Matthew 18:15-22 Moreover if **thy** (σοῦ- sing.) brother shall trespass against **thee** (σεῖ - sing.), go and tell him his fault between **thee** (σοῦ- sing.) and him alone: if he shall hear **thee** (σοῦ- sing.), thou hast gained **thy** (σοῦ- sing.) brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with **thee** (σοῦ- sing.) one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto **thee** (σοι - sing.) as an heathen man and a publican.

Clearly every usage of the second person singular pronoun (**thee**) is referring to the same offended brother. There is no clear switch to a different antecedent or postcedent. If there was a change of referent

Scripture, and that is the all-important context. In Matt. 11:23-24 we find the collective noun, Capernaum, first being used as a postcedent to a collective pronoun (thou). Only then, do we see the same collective noun used as the antecedent to the following plural personal pronoun at the beginning of verse 24 (you, ὑμῖν) and also to the singular personal pronoun at the end of verse 24 (thee, singular). Context shows that all the second person personal pronouns, regardless of number, refer to the same collective noun (Capernaum). This, indeed, demonstrates that the second person personal pronoun is being used as a collective pronoun. However, the same does not occur in the context of Matt. 18:15-21. The collective noun in the text (the Church—τῆς ἐκκλησίας) is not a postcedent to the second person personal pronoun that preceded it in the text, as was the case with Matt. 11:23-24. The text clearly shows that the second person personal pronoun is not being used as an antecedents to a collective noun (the Church), for Matthew speaks of telling the offending brother in verse 15 his fault *privately*—"between thee [singular] and him alone." If that second person personal pronoun was a collective pronoun, then there would not be any *privacy*, for the whole Church would be coming to tell him his fault! Plus, it would destroy the whole procedure of moving from one, to two or three, to the entire Church if "thee" was considered a collective pronoun. However, in Matt. 11:23-24 we clearly see from the context that the second personal pronoun is being used as a collective pronoun. If Matthew was using a similar construction in Matt. 18:15-22, he then would have used the plural pronoun you (ὑμῖν) in the phrase, "let him be unto you (ὑμῖν - plural) as an heathen man and a publican." But the fact is he did not and so he was not using a collective pronoun in the passage.

Matthew could have written it as follows, using the second person plural pronoun ὑμῖν: “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto **you-all** (ὑμῖν) as an heathen man and a publican. Then the collective noun of the Church would become the antecedent to the plural pronoun ὑμῖν.

Finally, the greater context clearly keeps the focus on the singular “offending” party and the singular “offended” party by the Holy Spirit concluding with verse 21 and 22 with our Lord affirming that the offended party is the focus of the second person personal pronoun in the text: “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall **my brother sin against me**, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto **thee** (σοι - sing.), Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” The “thee” in the context is the offended party in this hypothetical case, which in this instance would be Peter himself.

This leaves us with the remaining verses 18-20, which we will now discuss, for these are the verses that lead so many to mistakenly conclude that despite the grammatical context, Matthew is referring to the Church when he says, “let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” But when we examine them with the same hermeneutical principles, verses 18-20 will actually reinforce the fact that the Lord is using the pronoun “thee” in verse 17 to mean the individual and not the Assembly.

Let us once more provide the passage before us.

Matthew 18:15-22 Moreover if **thy** (σου- sing.) brother shall trespass against **thee** (σε - sing.), go and tell him his fault between **thee** (σου- sing.) and him alone: if he shall hear **thee** (σου- sing.), thou hast gained **thy** (σου- sing.) brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with **thee** (σου- sing.) one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto **thee** (σοι - sing.) as an heathen man and a publican. ¹⁸ Verily I say unto **you** (ὑμῖν - plural), Whatsoever **ye shall bind** (2nd per. pl. verb) on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever **ye shall loose** (2nd per. pl. verb) on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say unto **you** (ὑμῖν - plural), That if two of you (ὑμῶν – plural) shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. ²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto **thee** (σοι - sing.), Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

In the broader context, when we compare Scripture with Scripture, one sees the full significance of this passage in Matt. 18:15-22 by considering the subject matter of I Cor. 5 and I Cor. 6:1-8. Conversely, one can see the significance of the Holy Spirit joining back to back the subject matter of I Cor. 5 and I Cor. 6:1-8, in light of Matt. 18:15-21.

The First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter five, verse eleven, deals with sins that result in excommunication from the Assembly—a Christian living a life of sexual immorality, or a life of covetousness, of idolatry, of railing, or of drunkenness. This is crystal clear. Such a situation requires removal from the Assembly. However, I Cor. 6:1-8 we are dealing with sins that result in shame, but not in excommunication. Why? I believe it has to do with what type of sins that are involved and to whom the sin is committed against.

Perhaps, one could look at it in this way. I Cor. 5 has to do with sins against the “entire Assembly” (the little leaven) and so excommunication is involved, while I Cor. 6:1-8 has to do with sins against “individuals” and so excommunication is not involved, (much in the same way we in America consider criminal crimes to be against the “State or Society,” and yet civil crimes are considered to be against the “individual” (like the laws in Ex. 22:5-34).

Therefore, since Matthew 18:15 clearly deals with sins or an injustice done against an “individual,” it has more to do with I Cor. 6:1-8 and less to do with I Cor. 5. Thus, it seems the passage, more than likely, refers to what we would call today a civil lawsuit, which, generally is an injustice done against an individual.

Moses talks a lot about civil cases of one brother against another brother in the Old Testament. Paul also talks about these issues also in the New Testament. The disciples were most familiar with these types of issues, and it seems Christ is telling his disciples something like, “Moses told you how to handle these cases in the Law, but I am now telling you to handle such cases within My Church. Thus, he was fulfilling his role of the Prophet who would come, as Moses declared.

Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; 18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. KJV

Thus, as we continue to see the context of the passage unfold we can see how the two or three witnesses would parallel with Paul's exhortation in I Cor. 6:4 to find those least esteemed in the Church to deal with the same type of matters in Corinth. In other words, Paul was encouraging them to follow the instructions of the Lord.

I Corinthians 6:4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, **set them to judge** who are least esteemed in the church. KJV

In other words, "set them (plural) to judge," would be the equivalent of the two or three witnesses of Matt. 18:17. However, if they did not have a plural number to judge, Paul even allows one (singular) to judge. He states this in the next verse.

I Corinthians 6:5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, **not even one**, who will be able to judge between his brethren? NKJV

This also follows the instructions of the Lord, for in Matt. 18:16 the Lord states that even one could be brought to witness the case. (Take at least one with "you." Thus, if two could not be found, the "one" and "you" would still make up the minimum of two witnesses.)

Matthew 18:16 "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. NASB

Therefore, within the broader context of the New Testament, the two or three witnesses of Matt. 18:16 would be the equivalent of those "set to judge" in I Cor. 6:4-5. However, the parallel ends here. Paul does not address in I Cor. 6:1-8 what would happen if the offending party does not accept the judgment of the two or three witnesses (i.e. those asked to judge the matter). He only speaks of their shame for not following such a procedure.

But our Lord, in Matthew 18:17, explains the ongoing procedure that Paul does not address. Our Lord shows that the matter should then to be taken before the whole church, and if the offending party does not listen to the church, he is to be treated as a "heathen" and a "publican" by the party that was offended. (The word translated as "heathen" can also be translated as "Gentile," as it is in some other versions. It is the Greek word ἔθνικος, the adjectival form of ἔθνος, used as a substantive in this verse. BAG renders it as follows—"In the NT only as subst. ὁ ἔθνικος

the Gentile in contrast to the Jew.”¹⁴⁴ It is so rendered in the New American Standard Version.)

I think the fact that Matthew is dealing with sins against another brother and not with sins that affect the entire Assembly shows that we are dealing with a *civil matter*, so to speak, and not a more serious sin, that by today’s parlance, we would classify as a *criminal matter* – a sin against society.

This also explains why the judgment of the offending party is not that of excommunication, but rather a public reprimand and an allowance for the offended party to treat the one as a *heathen* (gentile) or *publican*.

For example, suppose a brother, let us name him Mathias, purposely does more work than was asked to be done and then sends a bill to another brother, who we will name Joseph, for work that the Joseph never asked to be done. Thus, upon discovering this, Joseph says he will not pay for that work. Mathias then says, “You owe me that money.” Joseph says, “I do not. I never asked you to do this work.” So Mathias then begins to spread gossip saying, “Joseph does not pay his bills.” Upon hearing this Joseph is offended and goes and asks Mathias for a retraction of the charge. Mathias refuses. So Joseph then brings one or two more brothers with him to Mathias to adjudicate the dispute. The one or two brothers side with Joseph against Mathias, and tell Joseph he is not under obligation to pay for the extra work. Mathias disagrees and leaves angrily and continues to spread rumors. So the case is brought before the entire Assembly and the one or two other brothers explain what happened and what their judgment was. The Assembly concurs, but Mathias refuses to listen to the Assembly. The Assembly then tells Joseph, you can treat him as a heathen and a publican for he is not being straightforward.

Now to treat Mathias as a heathen (gentile) would relieve Joseph of paying Mathias, for a Jew was not obligated to pay a heathen under certain circumstances, and this fact brings us to the final phrase in verse 17—the judgment. What does it mean to be treated as a *heathen* (gentile) and publican, i.e. a tax-collector? This is very important. We should be careful not to make this passage say something it does not say. As we said before, we must be very literal in our hermeneutic, as was demonstrated by the Holy Spirit with the example of John 21:23. We

¹⁴⁴ Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Fourth Edition (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1957) pg. 217

should always examine a text carefully according to a literal hermeneutic.

Consequently, what exactly does Jesus say in this judgment? First, let us look at what he did not say. First, Jesus did not say, “Remove him from your midst,” as the Holy Spirit did with the offending party in I Cor. 5:13. This verse does not deal with excommunication from an Assembly. Other portions in Scripture deal with excommunication, but this verse does not. And second, as was stated before, Jesus does not tell the whole Assembly to treat him as a heathen and a publican, but he tells the “individual” to treat him as a heathen and a publican. It says, “Let him be unto thee (singular), not “Let him be unto you (plural).

But someone may ask, as I once asked, “What good does it do for one to treat him as a heathen (gentile) and publican, when the rest of the Assembly does not have to treat him as such. It does not make any sense, for how is he disciplined if everyone else can continue to treat him as if nothing had happened.”

This is a legitimate question, and it did not make any sense to me, until I realized that we are dealing with sins against an individual and not sins against the Assembly. In fact, the fact that the Lord applies this to an individual and not to the entire Assembly helps us understand that the Lord had civil matters between brothers in mind and not such grievous or societal sins like we have in I Cor. 5. The passage in Matt. 18:15-21 is dealing with civil disputes, if you will, just like the civil disputes between brothers in I Cor. 6:1-8; consequently, just as the Holy Spirit does not state that the sins of I Cor. 6:1-8 entail excommunication,¹⁴⁵ neither does the Holy Spirit tell us the matters in Matt. 18:18-21 entail excommunication. But if the sins in Matt. 18: 15-22 do not refer to sins resulting in excommunication, what do those sins result in, that is, if the offending party does not acquiesce to the judgments made?

In order to properly understand the answer to that question, we must apply the second hermeneutic given to us in Scripture—the *historical hermeneutic* utilized by Mark under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Mark 7:1-3. What would it have meant to a first century Jew to consider

¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Paul gives a warning to them in the next verse, (I Cor. 6:19). These disputes may not warrant one from being removed from the Assembly, but if they become a way of life, and one continues to cheat one’s brethren, being covetous, or rapacious, or continues to spread gossip, being a reviler, such an one does then come under the judgment of I Cor. 5:11, which would entail one being removed or excommunicated from the Assembly..

someone a heathen and a publican? And what it would mean to Jesus. For Jesus would never want us to walk by the tradition of the Pharisees, but would want us to walk as He walked. **So, in reality, ultimately, we have to discover what it would mean to Jesus to treat someone as a heathen and publican or tax-collector.**

There is no doubt that Jews did not treat heathen (gentiles) the same way they would treat fellow Jews. For example there is a Talmudic story¹⁴⁶ that goes as follows—

“The government of Rome sent two commissioners...to investigate the Torah...these emissaries found it correct in all points except one (that if the ox of an Israelite gores an ox of a Gentile there is not liability, whereas there is liability if the ox of a Gentile gores that of an Israelite.”¹⁴⁷

This understanding of liability was also expressed in the Mishnah (*Baba Kamma* 4:3) many years before this Talmudic story.

“If the ox of an Israelite gored the ox of a gentile, the owner is not culpable. But if the ox of a gentile gored the ox of an Israelite, whether it was accounted harmless or an attested danger, the owner must pay full damages.”¹⁴⁸

This Talmudic and Mishnah understanding was based upon Exodus 21:35, and also the interpretation that certain laws only applied to one's neighbor. And, since a Gentile (heathen) was not considered a neighbor (in their mind), no compensation needed to be paid. This Rabbinical nuance of who is a neighbor is what was behind our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-27). The Rabbis would nullify certain obligations, because they concluded the Law of Moses only applied to neighbors, and if Gentiles (heathen), or Samaritans, were not considered neighbors, they ruled an Israelite was free from obligation. Thus we see a Gentile (heathen) was treated differently than an Israelite

In Scripture, of course, we know of the attitude of certain Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who never abandoned their Pharisaical attitudes. Even after they became Christians, they continued with this same

¹⁴⁶ See *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Baba Kamma* 4:4; also see *Babylonian Talmud*, *Bava Kamma* 38a.

¹⁴⁷ Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996) pg. 105

¹⁴⁸ Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992) pg. 337

Pharisaical mindset that treated Gentiles (heathen) differently (Acts 15:5). If one remembers, Peter was confronted by them because he went into a Gentiles house.

Acts 11:1-3 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him,³ saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” NKJV

And even Peter, who certainly was not a Pharisee, still had this attitude toward Gentiles after his conversion. (Again the English word, “Heathen” or “Gentile,” as used in these verses, refers to the same person. The underlying Greek word is the same. It is simply a matter of translation preference. For example, in the KJV the Greek word ἔθνη, the plural form of ἔθνος, used in Gal. 2:9, is the same word used in Acts 11:1, and yet the KJV translates it as “heathen” in Gal. 2:9, whereas it translates it as “Gentile” in Acts 11:1. In the same way, ἔθνικος, the adjectival form of ἔθνος used in Matt. 18:17 is translated as “heathen” in the KJV, whereas it is translated as “Gentile” in such versions as the NASB, the ERV, and the ASV.)

Acts 10:28 Then he said to them, “**You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company** with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. NKJV

As an aside, the NKJV translation might lead to a misunderstanding, if one thinks it’s translation of “keep company” is the same word Greek translated, “keep company” in I Cor. 5:11. The underlying Greek word is not the same word used in I Cor. 5:11. The word, in I Cor. 5:11, is the word συναναμίγνυμι which means to *mix or mingle with*, but the word used in Acts 10:28 is the Greek word κολλάω, which means *to cleave to or join to*, or *to associate closely with*.

W.E. Vine defines this word κολλάω, in part, as follows:

“To join fast together, to glue, cement...(from *kolla*, glue)... becoming associated with a person so as to company with him, or be on his side.”¹⁴⁹

So when W. E. Vine defines it above as “becoming associated with a person so as to company with him,” he means to be closely joined to a person, to be cemented together, and not, necessarily, simply to have social intercourse with such a one. Because of this, perhaps, the

¹⁴⁹ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. I, pg. 196

American Standard Version might better convey the meaning of this statement of Peter.

Acts 10:28 and he said unto them, Ye yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew **to join himself** or come unto one of another nation; and *yet* unto me hath God showed that I should not call any man common or unclean. ASV

In other words, while the first century Jewish attitude toward heathen (gentiles) did include some separation (mostly because of kosher laws and ceremonial defilement), it was not absolute separation. For example, the aforementioned Mishnah that freed an Israelite from certain financial obligations with a Gentile did not forbid all financial transactions with a Gentile.

Shabbath 1:7 it states the following:

“The School of Shammai say: They may not sell aught to a gentile or help him to load his beast or raise [a burden] on his shoulder unless there is time for him to reach a place nearby [the same day]. And the School of Hillel permit it.” (Shabbath 1:7) ¹⁵⁰

Social and financial interactions with Gentiles (heathen) were permitted under certain conditions.

Treating someone as a heathen or gentile did not bring up images of excommunication or absolute separation to a Jew. Gentiles were allowed to remain in Israel and interact with Jews. In the Law, which Jesus would never disobey, clearly states that absolute separation from a Gentile was not, necessarily, required. (It matters not whether the stranger was a proselyte of the gate or not, since the stranger was still considered to be of the Gentiles, and not an Israelite—cf. II Sam. 1:8 with II Sam. 1:13.)

Leviticus 19:33-34 `And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, **ye shall not vex him.** ³⁴ *But* the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, **and thou shalt love him as thyself**; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God. KJV

Numbers 15:13-15 All that are born of the country shall do these things after this manner, in offering an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. ¹⁴ And if a stranger sojourn with you, or whosoever *be* among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto

¹⁵⁰ Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992) pg. 101

the LORD; as ye do, so he shall do. ¹⁵ One ordinance *shall be both* for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth *with you*, an ordinance for ever in your generations: as ye *are*, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. KJV

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay *it* up within thy gates: ²⁹ And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) **and the stranger**, and the fatherless, and the widow, **which *are* within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied**; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest. KJV

So for Jesus to say in Matt. 18:17 that the offending party should be to thee as a Gentile never would bring up in the mind of a Jew that Jesus was saying that one must refrain from all social intercourse with such a one (which the excommunication of I Cor. 5 would entail).

In fact, in the story of Peter and Cornelius, the problem was not simply that Peter was in company with a Gentile, but that he went into the house of a Gentile and ate with him. In other words, the problem was not that he was eating with the Gentile, but the problem was “where” he was eating with the Gentile, and what he might have been eating. Generally speaking, a Jew could eat with a Gentile, if the Gentile came to the Jew to eat with him, but the reverse could not happen, wherein a Jew would go to a Gentile’s house to eat with him.

Again, if we look at the historical background of this passage we see that it was not forbidden for Jews and Gentiles to eat together in certain situations. Again in the Mishnah, in *Abodah Zarah* 5:5 (which reflects many of the traditions of the fathers adopted by the Jews of the Lord’s day) it states:

“If an Israelite was eating with a gentile at a table, and he put flagons [of wine] on the table and flagons [of wine] on the side-table, and left the other there and went out, what is on the table is forbidden and what is on the side-table is permitted; and if he had said to him: ‘Mix thy cup and drink,’ that which is on the side-table is forbidden also. Opened Jars are forbidden, and sealed jars [are forbidden if the Israelite was gone] time enough for [the gentile] to open [a jar] and close it up, and for the clay to dry.” ¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992) pg. 444

So we see that Israelites could eat with a gentile if certain kosher laws were maintained. In the example, above the concern was that the open flagon could be defiled when it was open, but the flagon on the side-table would not (unless one was gone too long, in which case it could be opened and resealed). Eating at the table with a Gentile was not forbidden, but it had many restrictions and obstacles.

Indeed, there is even a story that one of the famous sages of Israel, Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, who was one of major editors of the Mishnah, invited a gentile to his table, the Roman Emperor Antoninus. (This Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi was actually the great-great grandson of Rabbi Gamaliel, the Rabbi who taught the Apostle Paul—see Acts 22:3.) The story relates that Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi invited Antoninus to a Sabbath meal as recounted below in the *Midrash Rabbah*.¹⁵²

“Our Teacher made a meal for Antoninus on the Sabbath. Cold dishes were set before him; he ate them and found them delicious. [On another occasion] he made a meal for him during the week, when hot dishes were set before him.”

Nehemiah practiced the same, having invited heathen or gentiles to his table.

Nehemiah 5:17 Moreover *there were* at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, **beside those that came unto us from among the heathen *that are about us***. KJV

So we can see that by our Lord telling us in Matt. 18:17 to treat such a one as a heathen (gentile) did not mean that because this one was now to be seen as a heathen, one could not even “eat with him,” which would have been the case if Jesus truly meant for him to be excommunicated (as stated in I Cor. 5:11, where it says “not even to eat with such a one”).

Nor, was it forbidden to receive a Gentile into one’s house, as can also be seen in the story of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi and Antoninus. The problem was actually the reverse—that a Jew was in a Gentile’s house, which is why those in Jerusalem were upset with Peter.

For example, here was another precept in the Mishnah (*Abodah Zarah* 2:1) that speaks to this principle:

¹⁵² Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, Maurice Simon, eds., Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, trans, *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis, Bereshith, Vol. I* (The Soncino Press, London, 1983) pg. 82

“The daughter of an Israelite may not assist a gentile woman in childbirth since she would be assisting to bring to birth a child for idolatry, but a gentile woman may assist the daughter of an Israelite. The daughter of an Israelite may not suckle the child of a gentile woman, but a gentile woman may suckle the child of the daughter of an **Israelite in this one’s domain.**”¹⁵³

Now some may object to these stories and precepts from the Mishnah and Talmud in helping us understand Scripture (even though Mark 7: 1-11 sanctions, by example, using a historical hermeneutic). I understand that objection, since the Mishnah and the Talmud are not inspired texts and so are not authoritative and so should never be used as such. But since we did not live at the time the Lord spoke these words, reading such Jewish documents are the only way for us to know the historical context and understanding in which our Lord lived and spoke. He did not speak and teach in a vacuum. He knew what the religious leaders taught. He knew the thinking of the Pharisees, and, indeed, He knew what certain phrases would convey to His hearers. So, these documents help us understand what was in the minds of a first century Jewish person living in Israel.

Nevertheless, because Scripture is the final arbitrator in interpreting a text, let us leave aside the historical hermeneutic for the time being and focus on using the comparative method of comparing Scripture with Scripture to see if treating someone as a heathen or Gentile would mean such a one could not eat with, or receive such a one, into one’s house, which it would have to mean if Jesus was referring to excommunication (as it does in I Cor. 5 and II John 1:9-11).

Obviously, “being as a heathen” in Scripture did not mean absolute separation. Nor did it convey the idea that such a one should not be received into your house. Gentiles were clearly invited to stay in the Jewish household of Simon in the story of Cornelius and Peter.

Acts 10:22-23 They said, “Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was *divinely* directed by a holy angel to send for you *to come* to his house and hear a message from you.”²³ **So he invited them in and gave them lodging.** And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. NASB

¹⁵³ Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992) pg. 438

As such, we see that those same Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem never chided Peter for inviting heathen or Gentiles into a Jewish household in Joppa. They chided him for accepting the invitation to go into a heathen or Gentile household and, thus, eating with “them.” This clearly shows us that being a heathen or Gentile in Scripture, did not mean a Jew could not receive him into his house, or even that he could not eat with him in his own house.

Or consider the example of King David. He gave the Gentile, Ittai the Gittite, permission to lodge with him and those other Jews with him, when David fled into the wilderness. So we see that being a Gentile to David did not entail absolute separation. Indeed, David also shared with him and those with him the same food they gathered or were given (although it does not say that he ate directly with him in his presence, but I would not be surprised that he did since he was one of his military leaders, and it would be normal to eat together while they were planning strategies—see II Sam. 18:2).

II Samuel 15:19-22 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why will you also go with us? Return and remain with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile; *return* to your own place.”²⁰ “You came *only* yesterday, and shall I today make you wander with us, while I go where I will? Return and take back your brothers; mercy and truth be with you.”²¹ But Ittai answered the king and said, “As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.”²² Therefore David said to Ittai, “Go and pass over.” So Ittai the Gittite passed over with all his men and all the little ones who *were* with him. NASB

II Samuel 17:27-29 Now when David had come to Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim,²⁸ brought beds, basins, pottery, wheat, barley, flour, parched *grain*, beans, lentils, parched *seeds*,²⁹ honey, curds, sheep, and cheese of the herd, for David and for the people who *were* with him, to eat; for they said, “The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness.” NASB

Also, of course, we know that Uriah the Hittite ate together with David (II Sam. 11:13), as well as others (see I Sam. 30:10-12). And we know that King Solomon received a Gentile into his house, the Queen of Sheba (I Kings. 10:1-5). In fact, we even have the story in Scripture of Elijah actually sojourning in a house of a Gentile, the house of the widow of Zarephath! Obviously, Elijah did not believe this broke the Law of Moses. Nor did he believe the Law of Moses required him to never eat

with a heathen or Gentile. He not only lived in the house of a heathen, he also ate in the house of a heathen.

I Kings 17:9-11, 14-15, 17-19 “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, “Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink.”¹¹ And as she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand.”¹⁴ “For thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the face of the earth.’”¹⁵ So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for *many* days.¹⁷ Now it came about after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe, that there was no breath left in him.¹⁸ So she said to Elijah, “What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance, and to put my son to death!”¹⁹ And he said to her, “Give me your son.” Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. NASB

So, in the light of Scripture, even using the comparative hermeneutic, we still see that the Lord telling His hearers to “let him be to you as a heathen,” would never convey the idea of such separation and removal as conveyed by excommunication. And even the restrictions in the Mishnah and Talmud, which were so much more restrictive than Scripture, which should not surprise us, since the religious leaders who formed the rulings of the Mishnah routinely added to the Word of God with their traditions and man-made restrictions, did not forbid such separation as required in excommunication as commanded in I Cor. 5 and II John 1:9-11.

We even see in Scripture that the Lord Jesus, Himself, was willing to go into the house of a Gentile. Obviously, our Lord would never consider doing anything forbidden by the Law, and so He did not believe “being a Gentile” conveyed this idea of absolute separation. (The reason Peter was chided for doing the same thing was because a Jew not going into the house of a Gentile was one of those man-made traditions and restrictions that had been added to Scripture; and Jesus never followed those traditions of the elders that made the Word of God of none effect—see Mark 7:1-13.)

Matthew 8:5-8 And when He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, entreating Him,⁶ and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain.”⁷ **And He said to him, “I will come and heal him.”**⁸ **But the centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy for**

You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. NASB

So we see that the phrase to “let him be unto thee as an heathen man” in Matt. 18:17, would never bring up to the mind of a first century Jew the idea of excommunication, not in Scripture, nor even in the stricter precepts in the Mishnah. Nor would the phrase to “let him be unto thee as an heathen man” bring up the thought that one could never eat with such a one as required with excommunication. But it would convey to the mind of a first century Jew that future dealings, with such a one so designated, would entail certain restrictions, financial and otherwise.

It would convey to a first century Jew, as seen in Peter’s words in Acts 10:28, that one should not enter into any type of close partnership or joint activity that would require a cleaving or a joining together with such a one (as the word translated “keep company” means). And, while it also did not mean that such a one should not be received into your house, (as was required, for instance, in II John 1:9-11), it did make it difficult in the mind of some (at least as shown in the Mishnah) for a Jew to go into his house. In other words, to treat someone as a Gentile did not mean such a one could not be received into one’s house, nor did it mean you could not eat with him. It never conveyed such an idea of excommunication, but it did convey the idea that social interactions were to be restricted and certain financial obligations were considered in a different light, at least by those who abided by those further restrictions imposed by the traditions of the fathers. But let’s continue. Let’s look at the second designation of our Lord.

Next, in Matt. 18:17, Jesus says that not only is such a one to be unto you as a *heathen*, but also as a *publican*, i.e. *tax-collector*. Publicans or tax-collectors in the first century were notorious for being cheaters and thieves; they were known for robbing their fellow countrymen of money. However, even though they knew such to be the case, the Israelites, had no recourse, they must accept the fact that they were probably being cheated. They had to pay their taxes.

But, just like the case of a *heathen*, being a *publican* or *tax-collector* did not mean one could not be in the same house with such a one, nor it did not mean one could not even eat with such a one. Jesus, Himself, ate with tax-collectors. In other words, when Jesus said to treat him as a publican or tax collector, a first century Jew would not think Jesus was saying not to have any table fellowship with him as required by the

excommunication of I Cor. 5. Jesus regularly ate with publicans or tax-collectors, so much so that He got the following reputation.

Matthew 11:19 “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.” NKJV

So, obviously, to be told to let such a one “be unto thee as a publican” would not mean to treat him like the one in I Cor. 5:11, where the believers were told not even to “eat” with such a one. Matt. 18:17 is not speaking of the same thing as I Cor. 5:11.

So, with that being said, why would Jesus say to treat him like a *tax-collector*? (We will use the term tax-collector for the rest of this section since that term is more readily recognized than publican.) The answer to this also becomes clear when we understand that the context of the passage is dealing with sins against an individual and not sins against the Assembly.

As we said before, tax-collectors were notorious for being cheaters and that is the reason the Lord includes tax-collectors in his pronouncement. The judgment of the witnesses and the Assembly agreed that the offended party was being cheated, and by Jesus telling the offended individual, that he should treat him as if he is a tax-collector, Jesus is saying that since he will not listen to the Church, you will just have to let yourself be treated as tax-collectors treat you. In other words, Jesus is saying that sometimes it is better for disciples to just allow themselves to be cheated rather than insisting on their rights. It is as if he is saying, “Just realize this offending brother is just like a tax-collector. He is sinning. He is cheating you, but you will have to let it go.” Again, this parallels the thought of Paul in I Cor. 6:7.

I Corinthians 6:7 Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? **Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?** NKJV

This helps explain why the Lord includes a *tax-collector* in his pronouncement.

This distinction is more forcefully brought out by the old American Standard Version. The Greek text actually includes the definite article which is not seen in the King James Versions. By including an article the Holy Spirit is showing us our Lord is setting forth two distinct classes of people—“the” Heathen, and “the” Tax-collectors—with each one

representing a different conclusion from the viewpoint of a civil lawsuit, if you will. To treat someone like a heathen would encompass those types of lawsuits where the plaintiff is free from financial obligation in the mind of a first century Jew (i.e. according to the religious rulings of the day) and to treat someone like the “tax-collector” would also apply to those types of lawsuits where the plaintiff cannot collect what is due him because it was stolen from him by unfair taxes. We must not forget that the passage is dealing with sins against a neighbor—sins such as civil lawsuits, personal insults, gossip, and defamation of character or fraud, etc.

In other words, to help explain this, let’s return to the story of Mathias and Joseph that we offered above, except that this time let us pretend that Joseph pays for a healthy, strong lamb from Mathias, which Mathias says he will deliver on the morrow. But on the next day Joseph finds out that Mathias switched lambs and delivered instead a weak, sickly lamb. Joseph complains, but Mathias acts innocent and says this is the lamb we agreed upon. So Joseph calls off the deal and just asks Mathias for his money back. But Mathias refuses, declaring that the transaction was final. As such, the same procedure unfolds as in our story before, and in the end the Church agrees with Joseph and the other witnesses that Mathias wronged him, but Mathias still refuses to pay and so Joseph cannot collect on what is due him.

So, what then is to be done? The Assembly tells Joseph that he just must act as if Mathias were a *tax-collector*. In other words, the Church is telling Joseph to, “Accept your loss, brother, but realize the untoward character of Mathias.”

Mathias is not removed from the Assembly. He continues in the fellowship, he can still eat with them, but obviously, the public censure will hurt his business, and/or reputation, and perhaps, ultimately, leading him to repentance.

But, some may ask as to why Mathias is not simply removed from the Assembly? The answer is because the Holy Spirit in Matthew 18: 15-22 does not declare that his type of offense (as sinful as it was) rises to the type of offenses requiring excommunication as in I Cor. 5:11. In I Corinthians 5, Paul talks about sins, which, in one sense, could be considered criminal,¹⁵⁴ and so warrant exclusion from the Assembly; and

¹⁵⁴ Even in America adultery is still considered, in some states, to be a “criminal” crime.

then he talks about sins, which could be considered civil in the next chapter, in I Cor. 6, which do not warrant exclusion from the Assembly. It is as if Paul covers all bases in his epistle, both *civil sins* against individuals and *societal sins* against the Assembly. In this sense, one can see how Matthew 18: 15-22 lays the foundation for Paul's teaching in I Cor. 6: 1-8.

In fact, when we look at all the disciplinary verses in Scripture we see that the Holy Spirit covers all types of sin and the appropriate responses. They cover personal sins in Matt. 18:15-20, societal sins as in I Cor. 5, party sins as in Rom. 16:17, disorderly sins as in II Thess. 3:6, prideful sins as in II Thess. 3:14, sectarian sins as in Titus 3:10 and, finally, doctrinal sins as in I Tim. 6:3-5 and II John 9 (See again—“*Summary Chart of Disciplinary Verses in the New Testament*” on the chart below—Fig. 5).

Perhaps, it is not easy to understand the reason for the inclusion of such a procedure in God's Word because our modern economy is more diffused than it was in biblical times. We are more likely to broaden our business transactions with those who may not be saved because we are not being persecuted. But when Christians are persecuted they are forced to become inward, sometimes dealing exclusively with each other, and so, in such situations such civil disputes more easily arise.

For instance, in the 1800's in India, Christians were ostracized by their surrounding neighbors so much so that Christians in some cases were forced to form their own villages that were separate from the surrounding villages and cities. They were forced to fend for themselves, thus they dealt with each other in situations where it would be more likely that the same type of situations might arise as we see in Matt. 18:15-22.

These types of situations also arose in the Church in Jerusalem, when they were being ostracized by others (Acts 6:1). And it would not surprise me such situations are still happening today in many Churches that are set in a more agrarian type of setting where Christians deal more with each other than with those that are outside. Not that these are the only sins that are sins against a neighbor, but they were certainly those types of sins that were familiar to those living in Israel in the first century. Thus, we find the Lord using many types of agrarian symbols in his teaching and parables. But sins against a neighbor would, obviously, also encompass other types of personal affronts such as spreading rumors, personal assaults (remember Paul said an elder could not be a striker or a brawler—I Tim. 3:3), insults, etc.

Fig. 1—Summary Chart of Disciplinary Verses in Scripture

Passage of Scripture	Judgment Rendered	Type of Sins	Excommunication From Assembly
I Cor. 5: 11-13 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within <i>the church</i> ? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. NASB	Do not eat or associate with such a one. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves	Societal Sins	Yes
II John 1:9-11 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹ for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” KJV	Do not receive him into your house nor bid him Godspeed	Doctrinal Sins	Yes
Matt 18:15-17 And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ “But if he does not listen <i>to you</i> , take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷ “And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. NASB	Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer	Personal Sins	Possible (if it leads to further sin)
Titus 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; KJV	Reject after two warnings	Heretical Sins	Yes
Rom. 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. NASB	Keep your eye on, and turn away from them	Party Sins	Very Possible (could end up in excommunication)
I Timothy 6:3, 5a If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, <i>even</i> the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness...from such withdraw thyself. KJV	Withdraw	Self-serving Sins	Very Possible (could end up in excommunication)
II Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. KJV	From such turn away.	Apostasy	Yes
II Thess. 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. NASB	Take special note	Prideful Sins	No
II Thess. 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. KJV	Withdraw from	Disorderly Sins	No

Before we continue with the next verse, verse 18, one thing should be mentioned. Just because the judgment rendered by the Church in Matthew 18:17 does not entail removal (excommunication) from the Assembly, it does not mean the judgment is not a serious thing. The offending party, by ignoring the judgment of the Church, opens himself up to all kinds of spiritual danger.

For example, perhaps, it was pride that kept him from admitting his sin. If that was the cause, he should remember that “pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better *it is to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Prov. 16:18-19 KJV). Or, perhaps, it was bitterness, or, perhaps, a personal grievance or even a jealous spirit against the individual cheated (in our example, Joseph) that caused the offending party to ignore the Church’s judgment. In that case, the offending brother should remember that jealousy can lead to further sin and bitterness can spread through the soul like a root, leading to more defilement (Heb. 12:15). Whatever the reason, the Christian should realize that such disputes with other individual Christians as discussed by our Lord in Matt. 18:15-22, and as discussed by the Apostle Paul in I Cor. 6, are no light matter. In fact, they come with a special warning given to us by the Holy Spirit through Paul in I Cor. 6:9-10.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 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, ¹⁰ Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. KJV

These disputes may not warrant one being removed from the Assembly in the beginning, but if they become a way of life, as practiced by the unrighteous, it will lead to excommunication. If one continues to cheat the brethren, being covetous, or rapacious, or continues to spread gossip, being a reviler, such a one does then come under the judgment of I Cor. 5:11, which would entail one being removed or excommunicated from the Assembly.

In our example of Joseph and Mathias we saw that Mathias cheated Joseph. Because the Church rendered a judgment against him, they certainly would be keeping an eye on him. And even though our Lord did not command that he be excommunicated for that one sin of offending his brother, we know from other Scriptures that if such a one continues in certain sins, such as drunkenness or cheating, etc., wherein it becomes a

way of life, they would most assuredly have to be excommunicated according to such Scriptures as I Cor. 5:11.

In other words, in our example of Joseph and Mathias, if Joseph continued to cheat other brethren, he would then be considered a “swindler” (extortioner in KJV), which according to I Cor. 5:11 would be one of those things that would trigger his removal from the Assembly.¹⁵⁵

I Corinthians 5:11-13 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, **or a swindler**-- not even to eat with such a one.¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. NASB

Or, to use another example, if Joseph offended his brethren by appearing drunk in public (as some were doing in Corinth, even at the Lord’s Super—I Cor. 11:21) he would not, necessarily be considered to be a drunkard by that offense. But if he continued to appear drunk in public, he would then be known as a drunkard and would need to be removed from the Assembly according to I Cor. 5:11-13.

So, beloved, we see that the sins against one’s neighbor or fellow Christian referred to in Matt. 18:15 should never be treated lightly. They may lead to further sins that would, indeed, require such a one to be excommunicated. But the important point to remember is such a one would then be excommunicated by other Scriptures, such as I Cor. 5, II John 1:9-11, or II Timothy 3:5, not by Matthew 18:15-17.

Finally, before moving on to the next verse, it should be said that even though Jewish believers living in Israel during the first-century would understand that when Jesus said “let him be unto you as a heathen,” that they would then be free from certain financial obligations in certain

¹⁵⁵ The word translated *extortioners* in I Cor. 6:10 and I Cor. 5:11 is a Greek word that carries a meaning that is akin, according to W. E. Vine, the noun ἀρπαγή, which “denotes pillage, plundering, robbery, extortion (akin to harpazo, to seize, carry off by force).” Thus, it conveys a way of life that has become corrupt by covetousness and greed. See W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. II, pg. 64

situations, i. e. in accordance with first century Jewish jurisprudence, does not mean they should follow that standard also.

As long as a person was considered to not be a neighbour under the rabbinic rulings of the time, Israelites were free from fulfilling certain financial obligations, as we have already discussed. But the key word was who was a “neighbour,” which explains the reason Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan; Jesus was nullifying the rabbinic idea that only Israelites were neighbours.

As such, remember what we said before at the beginning of this is discussion on this verse. We said: “What would it have meant to a first century Jew to consider someone a heathen and a tax-collector? And what it would mean to Jesus. For Jesus would never want us to walk by the tradition of the Pharisees, but would want us to walk as He walked. **So, in reality, ultimately, we have to discover what it would mean to Jesus to treat someone as a heathen and tax-collector.**”

In this light, even though Jesus knew technically speaking that his hearers would take his statement as meaning that the offended brother would not have to be accountable for the work done without his permission (using our example of Joseph and Matthias) Jesus would also want his disciples to “go the extra mile,” which principle Jesus introduces in Matt. 5:41. If one remembers, Roman soldiers (Gentiles) who would conscript Israelites to serve them for a short distances. So if they conscripted you to go for one mile, Jesus says go with them for two.

Matthew 5:41 “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.” Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. NKJV

In other words, even though you are being treated unjustly, Jesus says return the injustice with kindness.

So, if we are to walk as Jesus walked, and if Jesus desires us to treat others as He would, then, perhaps it would be best for the offended party to reiterate once more that the offending brother was wrong in what he did, but in spite of that, he forgives the injustice. And even though he was not required to pay for the extra work done without his permission, even as the Church also declared (using our example of Joseph and Mathias), he would still go ahead and pay the brother for the work he never asked to be done and for which was unjustly charged. Is this not like Jesus would act? Did not Jesus forgive those who treated Him

unjustly? Did He not forgive such ones who refused to ask for forgiveness, because they believed they did nothing wrong (Luke 23:34)?

Using again our example of Joseph and Mathias, if Joseph acted just as Jesus would act, even though, technically, he was not required to do so, perhaps, Mathias would then be brought to repentance by such act of kindness to one who did not deserve it. As Paul, said—

Romans 12:17-21 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. ²¹ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. KJV

We will now continue on to Matt. 18:18, and discuss this verse with the same grammatical and historical hermeneutics, which we have applied to the previous verses of the passage.

Matthew 18:18-20 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. KJV

As we continue our study, we have to ask ourselves as to what connection *binding* and *loosing* has to do with the two parties involved in this situation we have been discussing? To answer this we need to realize that in Scripture “binding and loosing” refer to two distinct things—legislative pronouncements and judicial pronouncements. Regarding this Alfred Edersheim writes the following beginning first with the first occurrence of the principle of “binding and loosing” found in Matt. 16:19.

“For, assuredly, in interpreting such a saying of Christ to Peter, our first inquiry must be, what it would convey to the person to whom the promise was addressed. And here we recall that no other terms were in more constant use in Rabbinic Canon-Law than those of 'binding' and 'loosing.' The words are the literal translation of the Hebrew equivalents *Asar*..., **which means 'to bind,' in the sense of prohibiting**, and *Hiltir* ...**which means 'to loose,' in the sense of permitting**... This was one of the powers claimed by the Rabbis... If ... this then represented **the legislative**, another pretension of the Rabbis ...,” that of declaring 'free' or else 'liable,' i.e., guilty (*Patur* or *Chayyabh*),” expressed their

claim **to the judicial power**. By the first of these they 'bound' or 'loosed' acts or things; by the second they 'remitted' or 'retained,' **declared a person free from, or liable to punishment, to compensation**, or to sacrifice. These two powers—the **legislative and judicial**—which belonged to the Rabbinic office, Christ now transferred, and that not in their pretension, but in their reality, to His Apostles: the first here to Peter as their Representative, the second after His Resurrection to the Church.”¹⁵⁶

John Lightfoot, in his *Commentary of the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, even gives some examples of such binding and loosing:

“R[abbi] Jochanan said..., ‘Why have ye brought this elder to me? Whatsoever I **loose**, he **binds**; whatsoever I **bind**, he **looseth**.’”

“R. Chaija said, ‘Whatsoever I have **bound** to you elsewhere, I will **loose** to you here.’”

“They do not send letters by the hand of a heathen on the eve of a Sabbath, not nor on the fifth day of the week. Shammai **binds** it, even on the fourth day of the week, but the school of Hillel **looseth** it.”

“Women may not look into a looking-glass on the Sabbath-day, if it be fixed to a wall. Rabbi **loosed** it, but the wise men **bound** it.”

“Concerning gathering wood on a feast-day scattered about a field, the school of Shammai **binds** it, the school of Hillel **looseth** it.”

“R. Meir **loosed** the mixing of wine and oil, to anoint a sick man on the Sabbath.”¹⁵⁷

So we see that the concept of *binding* and *loosing* applied to two things—the legislative and the judicial power of the Rabbis, which our Lord is now granting to His disciples. In Matt. 16: 19, in combination with the keys of the kingdom, we have the legislative being granted, and here, in Matt. 18:18, in combination with two or three witnesses and the Assembly we have the judicial side of the concept being granted. A first century Jew would clearly understand this.

¹⁵⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. II* (E. R. Herrick & Company, New York, c.1897) Pg. 84-85

¹⁵⁷ Lightfoot, John, *Commentary of the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Vol.2* (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1989) pg. 238-241

The two or three witnesses in conjunction with the Church would declare the offending party liable (binding) or they would declare the party free (loosing) in the matter brought before them. They would judge that the offending party, indeed, had sinned against his brother or they would judge he did not sin against his brother. This is the judicial side of binding and loosing. This is what our Lord referred to in John 20:23 where he says—

John 20:23 If of any ye may loose the sins, they are loosed to them; if of any **ye may retain**, they have been retained.' Young's Literal Translation

This verse has nothing to do with the apostles having authority to dispense God's forgiveness of sins or to absolve a person of an actual sin as is done with the Catholic Sacrament of Penance. Only the Lord has such authority. This verse is speaking about the judicial authority to rule in civil disputes. They can remit the sin (loosing), and declare the defendant innocent, or they can retain the sin (binding), and declare the defendant guilty.

But what does it next mean when our Lord says that it shall be bound in heaven? Let us continue with the historical hermeneutic. Alfred Edersheim, again, brings out the common thought of the Jews at that time.

"In the view of the Rabbis heaven was like earth, and questions were discussed and settled by a heavenly Sanhedrin. Now, in regard to some of their earthly decrees, they were wont to say that 'the Sanhedrin above' confirmed what 'the Sanhedrin beneath' had done. But the words of Christ, as they avoided the foolish conceit of His contemporaries, left it not doubtful, but conveyed the assurance that, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, whatsoever they bound or loosed on earth would be bound or loosed in heaven."¹⁵⁸

This provides us an ample historical background to help us properly understand this verse. This verse has nothing to do with "binding" Satan, as some are wont to claim. It has to do with rendering judgments in certain cases brought before it. So with this important point in mind let us now continue to the grammatical hermeneutic, which will show how Jesus applied this differently than did the Rabbis.

¹⁵⁸ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. II* (E. R. Herrick & Company, New York, c.1897) Pg. 85

And in light of what we will now discuss, I would suggest a change in the last phrase of Alfred Edersheim's quote above to better reflect the underlying Greek text of Matt. 18:18. It would have been more in line with the Greek text if Edersheim would have ended his sentence as follows—"But the words of Christ, as they avoided the foolish conceit of His contemporaries, left it not doubtful, but conveyed the assurance that, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, whatsoever they bound or loosed on earth would have already been bound or loosed in heaven."

Why is this so?—because there is a change of tense in the verbs used in the text. The second use of *bind* in the verse is a periphrastic future perfect passive—i. e. a perfect passive participle joined to a future verb.

Thus, I believe the NASB (1995 edition) and Young's Literal Translation translates this verse more accurately.

Matthew 18:18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (NASB 1995)

Matthew 18:18 'Verily I say to you, Whatever things ye may bind upon the earth shall be having been bound in the heavens, and whatever things ye may loose on the earth shall be having been loosed in the heavens. YLT

Matthew 18:18 Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅσα ἐὰν δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται δεδεμένα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ· καὶ ὅσα ἐὰν λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται λελυμένα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

The same construction is also found in Matt. 16:19,

Matthew 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." (NASB 1995)

Matthew 16:19 and I will give to thee the keys of the reign of the heavens, and whatever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be having been bound in the heavens, and whatever thou mayest loose upon the earth shall be having been loosed in the heavens.' YLT

This is a fact overlooked by many. In regard to this important grammatical construction let me provide an extended quote from J. R. Mantey, the well-known Greek professor who, along with H. E. Dana authored, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. He wrote the following regarding this periphrastic future perfect passive in an paper entitled—*The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense in John 20:23, Mt 16:19, and Mt 18:18*.

“Over half of Christendom believes in sacerdotalism, that is, that certain men have been divinely authorized to forgive sins in behalf of God. And the above passages are ones quoted to substantiate such a doctrine. My thesis is to prove that the perfect tense has been mistranslated in these passages, and consequently that there is no basis for sacerdotalism or priestly absolution in the New Testament.”¹⁵⁹

During the first two centuries of the Christian era no one, according to the extant writings of the period, ever quoted John 20:23, Mt. 16:19 or 18:18 in favor of sacerdotalism. A study of the Ante-Nicean Fathers reveals that no Greek-writing Church Father ever cited these passages to support such a doctrine...But some Latin-writing Fathers quote these passages to prove that priests, as successors of Peter, can forgive men's sins. Augustine in his sermon on Luke 7:37 says: ‘So then God dwelleth in his holy temple, that is, in his holy faithful ones, in his church; by them doth he remit sins.’”¹⁶⁰

Since the men who knew Greek well and who wrote it never quoted these passages of Scripture to support sacerdotalism, it seems reasonable to assume that either the practice developed without Scriptural sanction or that it grew out of a wrong translation of Scripture.

At any rate, we find ample evidence of a wrong translation of the perfect tense in John 20:23, Mt 16:19 and 18:18 in the Latin version, which error has been repeated in all languages up to the present, as far as we know.¹⁶¹

A study of Mt 16:19 and 18:18...reveals that these passages teach just the opposite of what the advocates of sacerdotalism claim. The same verbs and tenses are found in both passages, the only difference being that in Mt 18:18 they are in the plural. How to translate the periphrastic form of the future perfect passive is the problem. In practical all translations of these passages the future perfect passive is translated as a simple future passive. Properly translated, ‘I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, but whatever you bind (δῆσῃς, an aor. Subj.) on earth *shall have been bound* (ἔσται δεδεμένον) in heaven, and whatever you loose (λύσῃς) on earth *shall have been loosed* (ἔσται λελυμένον) in heaven.’ Or in other words, Christ was informing his disciples that he was elevating them to the same rank and privileges that the scribes enjoyed, but at the same time he warns them not to perpetuate the abuses of the scribes, who taught things contrary to the Scriptures. Like scribes, they were to be interpreters of God's will to men, but in this capacity they are cautioned not to exceed their authority. Man is to ratify and obey God's decrees. This passage

¹⁵⁹ J. R. Mantey, “The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense in John 20:23, Mt 16:19, and Mt 18:18,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Sep., 1939), pp. 243

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pg. 243-244

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pg. 244

does not teach that God concurs in men's conclusions; but rather it teaches that those who live in accordance with Christ's directions will decide to do just what God has already decided should be done."

"Dr. C. B. Williams, in his modern speech New Testament published in 1937, has given the sense of this verse in these words: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven.'"¹⁶²

Goodwin says, 'The perfect participle in all its uses refers to an action as already finished at the time of the leading verb.' Applying this grammatical law to the passages in question, the proper translation is *Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound I heaven*.

It is possible that translators have confused a non-periphrastic use of the future perfect passive with the periphrastic... Thus when a participle and εἶμι are found together the construction is unquestionably periphrastic. It is this type of construction that exists in Mt 16:19 and 18:18. Therefore the verb forms should be translated in the regular way, '*shall have been bound*.'"¹⁶³

In conclusion, there is no instance in the New Testament of anyone having practiced sacerdotalism, nor is there any record in the first two centuries of anyone making use of John 20:23, Mt 16:19 or Mt 18:18 to support such a doctrine. And an accurate translation of the perfect tense precludes the possibility of such a teaching in the New Testament.^{164 165}

¹⁶² Ibid., pg. 246

¹⁶³ Ibid, pg. 247-248

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pg. 249

¹⁶⁵ Some might wonder, then, why the King James Version failed to properly translate these future perfect passives. No doubt the answer will be found in the fact that, for the most part, the Church of England in the early seventeenth century was still very sacerdotal, and many translators were members of the Church of England. William John Knox Little writes the following in his book, *Sacerdotalism: If Rightly Understood, the Teaching of the Church of England* (Longmans, Green, London, 1894) pg. xxi—"Either Sacerdotalism is true, or the teaching of the Church of England is a hollow and a disgraceful sham. Sacerdotalism, of course, is true. The Church of England is right. Those who deny the gospel truth of Sacerdotalism, and who pose as loyal members of the Church of England, they, I repeat, may settle the matter with their intellects and their consciences; but they have no right to describe as disloyal, men who in simplicity and straightforwardness have believed that the Church means what she says." As such, it should be kept in mind that in an otherwise excellent translation, sometimes, it seems, the underlying sacerdotal mindset of the translators may have unwittingly influenced their understanding of certain texts.

And then in another paper on the subject he provides the following quote by William Douglas Chamberlain:

“The future perfect was never widely used, and is almost extinct in the New Testament...There are a few future perfect periphrastics: *estai dedemenon* and *estai lelemenon* (Matthew 16:19). This is wrongly translated ‘shall be bound’ and ‘shall be loosed,’ seeming to make Jesus teach that the apostles’ acts will determine the policies of heaven. They should be translated ‘shall have been bound’ and ‘shall have been loosed.’ This makes the apostles’ acts a matter of inspiration or heavenly guidance. Cf. Matthew 18:18.”¹⁶⁶

Consequently, with these important grammatical issues explained, we will be able to better understand our verse in Matt. 18:18, as well as the aforementioned Matt. 16:19, wherein we see that Christ is declaring to Peter (with the keys of the kingdom) that in the future he will declare a “binding,” or a “loosing,” in accordance with what **has already bound or loosed** in heaven, and not the other way around. Of course, we have this fulfilled in Acts 10 with the opening of the door to the Gentiles for fellowship and the gospel. Peter “loosed” the restrictions on interaction with Gentiles, but he did not do this on earth until heaven first revealed to him that it had already been “loosed” in heaven.

Acts 10:28 Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. **But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.** NKJV

So we see that Peter decided this restriction could be “loosed,” because had a revelation from heaven that God had already loosed it! This was the legislative aspect of binding and loosing granted to Peter, as we mentioned before. Thus we see that the translation of the NASB more closely follows the Greek text.

Matthew 16:19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth **shall have been** loosed in heaven.” NASB

So Jesus is not saying that heaven will be bound or loosed by what the Church binds or looses, but rather the Church should be bound or loosened by what heaven has already bound or loosened.

¹⁶⁶ Julius R. Mantey, “Evidence that the Perfect Tense in John 20:23 and Matthew 16:19 is Mistranslated,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Volume 16, No. 3 — September 1973, page 132

But what helps insure that the Church binds or looses what has already been bound or loosed in heaven in Matt. 18:18? (Of course, now in Matt. 18:18 this binding and loosing refers to the judicial aspect of binding and loosing and not the legislative aspect.) We have no indication of a revelation or vision from heaven given by God to His Church in our verse before us, as Peter had in Acts 10. All Jesus says is: 'Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.' (NASB 1995)

So how does the Church know what has been already bound or loosed in heaven? I believe, Jesus give us the answer in the final two verses.

First he tells us the following in verse 19. Let us look at Darby's translation and then Young's literal translation.

Matthew 18:19 Again I say to you, that if two of you shall agree on the earth **concerning any matter**, whatsoever it may be that they shall ask, it shall come to them from my Father who is in *the* heavens. Darby

Matthew 18:19 'Again, I say to you, that, if two of you may agree on the earth **concerning anything**, whatever they may ask -- it shall be done to them from my Father who is in the heavens. Young's Literal Translation

Unlike other versions, Darby and Young do not directly combine the thing they are asking for with the thing they agree on; they separate the two clauses with their two different verbs with a comma (i.e. agree and ask). In other words, the emphasis is not directly placed on what they ask, but rather, on the matter that they agree on. The King James Version, however, combines the verb (shall ask) of the second clause above with the first clause, thereby placing emphasis on the prayer that they agree on.

Matthew 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching **any thing that they shall ask**, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. KJV

But the emphasis is on their agreement on the matter before them, not on what they will subsequently ask or pray for.

This is significant because Jesus is giving us a safeguard in this verse. After the judgment of verse 17, Jesus assures the church in verse 18 that what they bind on earth will have already been bound in heaven. Therefore, the binding of verse 18 refers back to the church in verse 17.

Matthew does this by changing from the singular σοι in verse 17, to the plural ὑμῖν in verse 18. (See again the chart on page 272, *An Analysis of the Change of the Personal Pronoun Συ in Matthew 18 from Plural to Singular*). Let me provide the portion of Matthew again below.

Matthew 18:15-20 “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

¹⁶ “But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.

¹⁷ “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

¹⁸ “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (NASB 1995)

¹⁹ Again I say to you, that if two **of you** (ὁμῶν - plural) shall agree on the earth concerning any matter, whatsoever it may be that they shall ask, it shall come to them from my Father who is in *the* heavens.

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Darby’s Version)

In the same way, as verse 18 refers back to the church in verse 17, the next verse, verse 19 now refers back to the verse 18 (along with two or three witnesses in verse 16). This is shown because in verse 19 Jesus says if two of you (ὁμῶν —plural) shall agree. The personal plural pronoun “you,” of course, refers to the Church from which the witnesses came. In other words, he is referring to the two or three witnesses that were chosen from the Church to be the witnesses with the offended brother in verse 16. In fact, we have a variant in verse 19 and in some Greek texts, like the Greek text the New American Standard Bible uses; we have an added preposition so that it would literally read, “...if two out from you shall agree.” The phrase is ἐξ ὁμῶν. The Greek text reads as follows:

Matthew 18:19 Πάλιν [ἀμὴν] λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν δύο συμφωνήσωσιν ἐξ ὁμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς περὶ παντὸς πράγματος οὗ ἐὰν αἰτήσωνται, γενήσεται αὐτοῖς παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς.

This Greek text uses the preposition ἐξ (εκ), meaning “out of,” which refers to the witnesses chosen *from*, or *out of* the Church to go with the offended brother to confront the offending brother. Now it does not matter which variant is correct because they both mean the same thing, since ὁμῶν (you—plural) is still a genitive of source, even without the preposition; but it shows that verse 18 refers back to verse 17 and verse

19 refers back to verse 18 in conjunction with verse 16. Jesus is taking us backward through the procedure.

Why is this significant and how does this help insure that what the church binds on earth will be that which was already bound in heaven? The answer is because of what Jesus says in verse 19.

Perhaps it will be helpful if I put it into interlinear form using George Ricker Berry’s *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Fig. 6)¹⁶⁷

Fig. 6—George Ricker Berry, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament

Matthew 18:19	Πάλιν	λέγω	ὕμῖν	ὅτι	ἐάν	δύο
	Again	I say	to you	that	if	two
ὕμῶν	συμφωνήσωσιν	ἐπὶ	τῆς	γῆς	περὶ	παντός
of you	may agree	on	the	earth	concerning	any
<u>πράγματος</u>	οὗ ἐάν	αἰτήσονται	γενήσεται	αὐτοῖς		
<u>matter</u>	whatever	they shall ask	it shall be done	to them		
παρὰ	τοῦ πατρός μου	τοῦ	ἐν	οὐρανοῖς		
from	my Father	which [is]	in [the]	heavens		

What we see clearly here in George Ricker Berry’s interlinear is that the middle part of this verse says, “If they agree on earth concerning any “matter” (πράγματος).” This is not seen in most translations because they simply translate πράγματος as the “thing” that they ask, thus making it seem, in some minds, at least, that verse 19 is a separate principle being introduced by our Lord on the subject of prayer. Thus, they separate the thought of the verse 19 from the previous verses (vs. 15-18). That is not what is occurring here. Jesus is referring to the “matter” of the case at hand (verse 16), not to some unrelated, or different “thing” brought to God in prayer. Verse 19 is not introducing a new thought, but rather is completing the thought of verses 15-19.

Consider how W. E. Vine defines πράγματος:

¹⁶⁷ George Ricker Berry, *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1993) pg. 50 (Bold print and underline added)

“...denotes (a) that which has been done, a deed, translated ‘matters’ in Luke 1:1, R.V. (A.V., ‘things’); ‘matter’ in 2 Cor. 7:11; (b) that which is being done, an affair, translated ‘matter’ in Rom. 16:2, R.V. (A.V., ‘business’); I Cor. 6:1, in a forensic sense, a law-suit (frequently found with this meaning in the papyri)...”¹⁶⁸

Notice the last sense of the word that is underlined above. It was used frequently in the papyri for law-suits, and what is interesting is, the very same word in Matt. 18:19, is also used in I Cor. 6:1 regarding a “matter” against a brother, or, as it is translated in the NASB, a “case.” In other words, it refers to some legal or civil matter brought against a fellow Christian. This shows again the parallel between these two passages.

I Corinthians 6:1 Dare any of you, having a **matter** against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? KJV

I Corinthians 6:1 Does any one of you, when he has a **case** against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? NASB

So our Lord in Matt. 18:19 is referring to the “matter,” or the facts of the “case” at hand, that involves the two brothers who have a dispute. He is referring to the facts of the case to which the two or three witnesses we called out from the Church to adjudicate.

Now that we have seen the greater context of verse 19 and how it fits together with the other verses, we now need to look closer at the relative pronoun and conjunction οὗ ἕκαστος (whatever) that introduces the next clause which follows the comma placed after the word “matter,” as we saw in Darby’s and Young’s translation above.

To bring out the relationship of this relative pronoun and this conjunction that points backward to an antecedent, and forward to a condition, perhaps, we might paraphrase the verse as follows: “Again I say unto you that if two of you on earth agree about any matter, whatever they ask *in regard to this matter*, will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.” I know this is not a proper translation, as it is but a paraphrase, but it conveys for us the fact that the emphasis in the verse is not on two brothers coming to an agreement in prayer, but rather on coming to

¹⁶⁸ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. III, pg. 48

agreement in regard to a “matter” at hand, from which “matter,” their prayer then arises.

The Syriac translation of this verse by Lewis also emphasizes this.

Matthew 18:19 Again, verily I say unto you, [if] they shall agree upon earth about every thing, what they shall ask shall be theirs from my Father which is in heaven. LEW

Alfred Marshall’s *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* also brings this out (Fig. 7).¹⁶⁹

Fig. 7—Alfred Marshall’s The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament

Matthew 18:19							
Πάλιν	[ἀμὴν]	λέγω	ὕμῖν	ὅτι	ἐὰν	δύο	
Again	truly	I say	to you	that	if	two	
συμφωνήσωσιν	ἐξ ὑμῶν	ἐπὶ τῆς	γῆς	περὶ	παντὸς		
agree	of you	on the	earth	concerning	every		
πράγματος	οὔ ἐάν	αἰτήσονται	γενήσεται	αὐτοῖς			
thing	whatever	they ask	it shall be	to them			
παρὰ	τοῦ πατρός	μου	τοῦ	ἐν	οὐρανοῖς		
from	the Father	of me	-	in	heavens		

Our brother MacDonald, while not delving into the grammar of the text, essentially says the same thing, at least in regard to the prayer itself. He writes:

“The question arises, ‘How large must an Assembly be before it can bind and loose, as described above?’ The answer is that **two** believers may bring such matters to God in prayer with the assurance of being heard. While verse 19 may be used as a general promise of answers to prayer, in the *context* it refers to prayer concerning church discipline.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Samuel Bagster and Sons Ltd., London, 1966) pg. 79

¹⁷⁰ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995) pg. 1274

The only point I might mention is while he essentially says the same thing regarding the context of the prayer, he seems to link the “two” (which he puts in bold print) to the Assembly in verse 18, rather than the two or three witnesses in verse 16. He says the answer to how large an Assembly must be before it can bind and loose is two. But, obviously, we should ask ourselves as to how that could be, if in the context the number *two* means the smallest number that can constitute an Assembly, and, as such, those two agree on any matter in regard to Church discipline, who is there to discipline? There are only “two” in the Assembly!

Now that is not to say that two cannot make up an Assembly. I believe they can, as the next verse (verse 20) will imply. But the question at hand is that whether within this context Matthew is referring to an Assembly when he says, “...if two of you agree on earth concerning any matter,” or is he referring to the witnesses of verse 16, the smallest number of them being two.

I think the answer is it must be the **two** or three witnesses in verse 16 for the reason we have just stated, let alone the fact that Matthew clearly says two of “you” (the plural personal pronoun “you” meaning the Assembly out of which the two came).

With this understanding, we see the relative pronoun restricts the prayer to the case before them. The “matter” before them becomes the context or source of their request made unto the Father. Verse 19 is not a promise that any prayer about anything will be answered if only two people are in agreement with what they will pray. That is not to say that we might not have here a *general* principle that unanimity in prayer is always important to God and is so honored by Him. Many things in Scripture can provide us a general principle that can be taken from a specific principle or promise, as long as one does not change the general principle into specific promise. If one does so, many times a young Christian might be misled and disappointed, because they pray in agreement with another believer about a request, but the promise to do whatever is asked, seemingly, is not kept.

No, the promise of our Lord here is very specific; it refers to prayers made by two or three witnesses chosen by the Church to adjudicate a “matter” between two Christians. It specifically refers to prayers having to do with the specific matter of the case and not to prayers in general.

And this brings us to the final point in this verse. Because our Lord begins the verse with the adverb, *πάλιν* (again) in the phrase, “Again I

say to you,” we see that our Lord restates what He had just said in the previous verse (verse 18).

John Albert Bengel, that well-known Greek scholar speaks to this in his classic work on the Greek New Testament, his *Gnomon*¹⁷¹ of the New Testament. And even though he does not interpret the verse in accordance with what we have stated above, he does speak of the contextual nature of the adverb. He writes:

“Πάλιν, again) The same thing is repeated in somewhat different language. The particle πάλιν is used epitatically, as in ch. Matthew 19:24, and Galatians 5:3.”¹⁷²

Notice he says that πάλιν is used epitatically. This is a common literary device in the New Testament that restates a fact in greater detail and/or for greater explanation. Jesus is further developing the thought of binding and loosing mentioned in verse 18. In a referenced footnote to Bengel’s quote above, his Appendix is referenced where he defines this literary device as follows:

“EPITASIS is, when to a word or enunciation already set forth, there is added in the following enunciations, or in the continuation of the discussion, some emphatic increase, or any sort of explanation...At times a statement or assertion is put twice; first simply, [then] afterwards with *Epatasis*, as in John xiii.34 ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους·—ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους...”¹⁷³

In his example above the simple statement ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους (that you love one another) is given greater emphasis by further explanation, with the first assertion being followed with καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους (even as I have loved you, so should you also love one another). In other words, he explains why they should love one

¹⁷¹ In regard to the term *Gnomon* (which is the pointed part of a sundial) Bengel wrote in his Preface: “I have long since given the name of Gnomon, a modest, and, as I think, appropriate, title, to these *Exegetical Annotations*... It is, in short, my intention, briefly to *point out*, or *indicate*, the full force of words and sentences, in the New Testament, which, though really and inherently belonging to them, is not always observed by all at first sight, so that the reader, being introduced by the straight road, into the text, may find as rich pasture there as possible. The Gnomon points the way with sufficient clearness. If you are wise, the text itself teaches you all things.” John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, Vol. I (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1876) pg. 9

¹⁷² John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, Vol. III (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1876) pg.351

¹⁷³ Ibid., Vol. III, pg. 408

another—because Jesus loved them first! And, in the restatement he gives greater details, explaining how they should love one another—with the same love with which he loved us! This is epitasis, and this is what Jesus is also doing in Matt. 18:19. The simple statement of fact is given in verse 18 concerning binding and loosing; then Jesus restates it with further detail in verse 19, explaining how the matter has already bound or loosed in heaven. He is providing more details regarding the procedure.

In other words, verse 19 reveals the reason why that which the Church binds or looses in verse 18 is already considered to be bound or loosed in heaven. That reason is because the two or three witnesses, who are dealing with the “matter” (civil lawsuit or disagreement) of verse 15, came to a unanimous agreement in verse 16 concerning every matter of the case, after which they then made a request to the Father regarding that case, which request the Father grants.

For example, let’s say the witnesses came to an agreement concerning every aspect of the dispute. As such, they then ask the Lord for wisdom in deciding the case, whether to bind (hold liable), or to loose (hold guiltless) the offending brother. Or perhaps, they ask the Father a direct question such as, “Father, is our brother guilty?” Or, on the other hand, perhaps, they make a direct request to the Father such as—”Father, it seems to us our brother is not liable. Is this the truth of the matter? Please grant us the wisdom to know.”

In this light, Jesus says the Father will answer their prayer from heaven and grant them the wisdom to know His will in the matter, or how He judges the matter. This is the first safeguard—unanimity of every matter of the case. This becomes the first confirmation of heaven. This is the promise of God. This is the manner by which the binding or loosing first occurs in heaven, before the two or three witnesses ever bring the dispute to the whole church. It is first made to the two or three witnesses. Then, when the church hears their decision, they either bind or loose the offending brother. Thus, the binding or loosing of heaven does, indeed, occur before the Church binds or looses (having been made known to the two or three witnesses through their prayers) perhaps, by a day earlier, or maybe by a few days earlier, or maybe the two or three witnesses even prayed to the Father right before entering the Assembly.

But the point in all this is to remember is that the binding or loosing of heaven occurred before the binding or loosing done by the Church. It was first made known to the two or three witnesses by the Father in

heaven in answer to their prayer of verse 19, so as to be conveyed to the Assembly for their decision in regard to the matter.

So we see that the future perfect passive is a correct translation—"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth **shall have been bound in heaven**; and whatever you loose on earth **shall have been loosed in heaven** (Matt. 18:18 NASB 1995).

However, if the two or three witnesses do not agree in every matter dealing with the case, but still bring it before the Assembly, the binding or loosing can never have the sanction of heaven. **This requirement of unanimity in the procedure is the first safeguard in obtaining the affirmation of heaven.** Jesus clearly puts a condition on His promise that the Father would answer their prayer in regard to the dispute. Jesus says "if" they agree on every matter (*of the case*) the Father will bring about what they request.

Thus, if there is not unanimity between those chosen to adjudicate the case, the dispute should never be brought to the Assembly, for the binding or loosing of heaven cannot be known, until and unless the Holy Spirit brings about unanimity between the witnesses. The Greek word translated "agree" is defined by Vine as "to sound together (*sun*, together, *phone*, a sound), i.e., to be in accord, primarily of musical instruments."¹⁷⁴ So it conveys the meaning of harmony, having no discordant note, having a complete agreement to all the facts of the dispute.

If the witnesses cannot be in complete and full agreement in everything, then the brothers must accept the fact that, apparently, the Lord desires them to drop the issue and be reconciled. If the brother who felt slighted or cheated still feels so, then the Lord would ask him to let it go, as Paul also says in I Cor.6:7.

I Corinthians 6:7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? NASB

The brother should realize that if the Lord Jesus was willing to be wronged, unjustly accused of many things, how much more should we be willing to be wronged and not take it into account? After all it was our sins that caused Him to suffer for me on the cross!

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., vol. 1 pg. 43

Conversely, if the other brother who felt falsely accused of cheating, still felt that way, perhaps, he should take into account the fact that a brother still feels wronged and that in such cases, Jesus said the following, “If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering (Matt. 5:23-24). Perhaps the brother should, if the dispute involved money, simply make good the disputed amount, or, at least, try to come to some compromise if the money involved more. After all was it not the apostle Paul who told us—”For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (II Cor. 8:9 KJV). If the Lord Jesus could give up so much for me cannot I give up a little for my brother who feels cheated by me?

However, if the Holy Spirit leads the two or three witnesses into complete agreement and they receive an answer in prayer regarding the binding or loosing of the Father in heaven, then they are told to bring it to the Church. And, because the Church has chosen the two or three witnesses to adjudicate the matter, and because the Church does not know all the facts of the dispute, and because the two or three witnesses were brought by the Holy Spirit to unanimity and so received knowledge of heaven’s binding or loosing in regard to the matter, the Church affirms either the binding of heaven or the loosing of heaven that was made known to those who were asked to judge the matter.

This explains why the two periphrastic perfect participles of binding and loosing should be translated not as a simple future passive, but as a future perfect passive. Jesus is explaining how it is known that the matter **has already been bound or loosed** in heaven before the two or three witnesses, along with the two brothers in dispute bring it to the Assembly. The Father made it known by the Holy Spirit in answer to their prayer. Thus, the Assembly affirms the binding or loosing of heaven that the Father already revealed to the two or three witnesses. This is the first safeguard, unanimity of judgment. But there are more safeguards.

The second safeguard given to us by Jesus is being gathered in His name; it is given to us by Jesus in verse 20 as part of the *epitasis* of verse 19.

Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.” NASB

Verse 19 explained verse 18, and now verse 20 explains verse 19. It explains why the Father will answer the request made by the two or three witnesses. It reveals the reason behind His promise to grant the request, which is that the request is made **in the name of Jesus**, because the two or three witnesses gathered in nothing but the name of Jesus.

Our brother MacDonald once again makes a helpful comment on this verse regarding the tendency of many to lift this verse out from its context and to specifically apply it in ways that our Lord did not intend it to be applied. There is nothing wrong in making other application of this verse as many times Scripture can have a two-fold application as we already said—the specific and contextual application and then a general application. The problem arises when over time the specific application is ignored and the general application becomes the dominate interpretation. The Holy Spirit gave us this precious verse to be understood within its own specific context, as our brother MacDonald succinctly reminds us, saying—

“Verse 20 should be interpreted in light of its context. It does not refer primarily to the composition of a N. T. church in its simplest form, not to a general prayer meeting, but to a meeting where the church seeks the reconciliation of two Christians separated by some sin. It may legitimately be applied to all meetings of believer where Christ is the Center, but a specific type of meeting is in view here. To meet ‘in His name’ means by His authority, in acknowledgment of all that He is, and in obedience to His Word.”¹⁷⁵

So we see that this verse cannot be divorced from the preceding context. It explains why the request made by the two or three witnesses is answered, that being that all that they do is done in the name of Jesus for that is the name in which they are gathered. The fact that they are gathered in the Lord’s name insures that their decision is in line with the decision of heaven. If they were not gathered in His name, their decision “may” or “may not” have the sanction of heaven. This is the specific context of this verse. It is important to remember that verse 20 begins with the conjunction γάρ (for), which means it explains the previous statement of verse 19. It exegetes the previous point.

But what exactly does being gathered in His name mean? When we understand this phrase first in its primary sense, we see that being gathered together in his Name of Jesus means more than just being non-denominational, it means more than just not taking upon ourselves a

¹⁷⁵ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995) pg. 1274

name that will separate us from other Christians. Being gathered together in his Name means being gathered together in all that our Lord is. It means being in harmony with everything of the Lord. It means acting according to His nature, character, and purpose, and not in any whit according to our own nature, character, or purposes.

As such, since a carnal Christian will act according to his own nature, character, and purposes, and a soulical Christian will act according to a mixture of his own nature, character and purposes, along with our Lord's nature, character, and purposes, it is important for spiritual Christians to be the ones chosen to fulfill this solemn aspect of Church discipline. In one sense, one could say this safeguards the second safeguard of being gathered only in His name.

This is also revealed to us in another place by the apostle Paul, in Gal. 6:1, as well as in I Cor. 6:5, where, obviously, a wise man would be a spiritual man.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. NKJV

I Corinthians 6:5 I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? KJV

This is so important because a carnal or soulical Christian will have a difficult time truly gathering in the name of Jesus (meaning in full accordance with his nature and character), and if that is the case, there is a great danger that the binding or loosing of verse 19 will not have the true sanction of heaven (although the carnal or soulical two or three witnesses will more than likely be utterly convinced that God is endorsing their judgment in the matter).

As such, it is important that those who are chosen to adjudicate disputes between Christians should be "wise," not with the wisdom of the world, but with the wisdom of the lowly, which is the wisdom from above!

I Corinthians 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. KJV

Romans 12:16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. NASB

In other words, they should be Christians filled with the wisdom from above.

James 3:13, 17 *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?* let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. KJV

Such Christians should be no less like those chosen to settle the dispute between the Hellenist and Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem so many years ago—men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

Acts 6:3 “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, **full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom**, whom we may appoint over this business. NKJV

It is so sad that much of Church discipline done throughout the centuries was never done by men who were filled with the Holy Spirit and the wisdom that is from above, but rather was done by Christians who were filled with themselves, with “soulical” and self-righteous mindsets, who were always seeking power, being so sure they were always speaking in God’s name, when in reality they were not.

A soulical Christian is one who is primarily controlled by self, and has an aversion to the work of the cross in their daily lives. Rather than denying self, they affirm self. Rather than esteeming others as more important than themselves, they esteem themselves as more important and preach and teach the importance of self-love. They may understand the way of the cross in salvation, but they do not understand the way of the cross in sanctification. As such, a soulical Christian chosen to be one of the two or three witnesses will be more than likely characterized by those things in the following paragraph, while a spiritual Christian will be more than likely characterized by the opposite.

Thus, a soulical Christian will love to exercise authority, easily and often. A spiritual Christian will not, but will be careful in judgments, fearful that he might not judge aright. A soulical Christian will be swift to speak, ever asserting his own viewpoint without any thought of compromise. A spiritual Christian will be slow to speak, ever ready to hear and consider the viewpoints of others. A soulical Christian will often be uncompromising. A spiritual Christian will ever be ready to compromise, as long as it does not compromise truth and remains within

the bounds of Scripture. A soulical Christian will be self-righteous, always ready to justify their actions and themselves. A spiritual Christian will cling to the righteous in Christ, fearful lest they might be self-righteous. A soulical Christian will be stubborn and unyielding. A spiritual Christian will bow low before others, and be easily intreated. A soulical Christian will demand conformity. A spiritual Christian will grant liberty. A soulical Christian will be unforgiving to those who are stubborn. A spiritual Christian will be forgiving to those who are stubborn. In other words, a soulical Christian will have a tendency to be merciless, while a spiritual Christian will pray that he always be merciful. A soulical Christian will demand respect. A spiritual Christian will give respect. And, most importantly to one who is to judge—a soulical Christian will show partiality to those whom they “think” might embrace the same viewpoint as themselves, whereas a spiritual Christian will show no partiality to those whom they “know” embrace the same viewpoint as themselves. And, then, finally, a soulical Christian will be sure they are spiritual, while a spiritual Christian will be afraid they are soulical.

Why is this so important, dear brethren? The answer is because a “soulical” Christian cannot discern the things of the Spirit of God, for they are spiritual discerned.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 But the natural (soulical) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.¹⁵ But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.¹⁶ For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. KJV

And what many Christians do not realize is that just as they can walk like the world walks, and so be carnal like the world is carnal, so too, they can walk just like the world walks and so be soulical (natural) just like the world is soulical.¹⁷⁶ (See Fig. 8—Three Different Types of Christians.)

I Corinthians 3:3 for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? (i.e. the natural men of I Cor. 2:14) NKJV

¹⁷⁶ For a further study on this issue, please see *Press on to Spirituality*, also freely available in digital format or freely available in paperback at: <http://www.silicabiblechapel.com/online-e-books.html>

Fig. 8—Three Different Types of Christians

THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHRISTIANS ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES		
<u>Noun</u>		<u>Adjective</u>
Characterized by a renewed spirit		
Pneuma (spirit)	I Cor. 2:15; 3:1; 14:37	>Pneumatikos (spiritual)
Characterized by a fleshly soul		
Psuche (soul)	I Cor. 2:14 cf. 3:3	>Psuchikos* (soulical)
Characterized by the flesh or body		
Sarx (flesh)	I Cor. 3:1 & 3	>Sarkikos (carnal)
*translated “natural” in most translations, but as seen above it is simply the adjective of the Greek word “soul” as “spiritual” is the adjective of the Greek word for “spirit”, and, consequently, would be better understood if translated as “soulical.”		

So if one is to pray to the Father and be granted one’s request as promised in verse 19, then one must pray in the name of Jesus, for every prayer made “in the name of Jesus” will be answered.

John 16:23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give *it* you. KJV

And if one is to pray in the name of Jesus with reference to a matter or a dispute, one must be gathered in the name of Jesus, which means thinking and acting in accordance with His nature, character and purpose. And for any Christian to be acting in accordance with His nature, character and purpose, such a Christian must be spiritual. And for a Christian to be spiritual, means such a one must be walking by the Spirit being full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. And if a Christian is spiritual, being full of the Spirit and wisdom, such a one will have spiritual discernment, and so will be able to know the mind of the Lord which Jesus says the Father will make known to them in answer to their prayer.

So if the two or three witnesses are gathered in His name, and come to unanimity regarding a matter, thus having the promised presence of Christ in their midst during their decision making process, they will be shown the binding or loosing of heaven, which they will then make known to the Church, which in turn, being also gathered in the name of the Lord, will pronounce to the brother in question their binding or loosing of the matter.

This same truth of Christ's presence and will, being the basis of our actions, is also shown forth in II Cor. 2:10. The Greek of this verse is difficult because we have an ellipsis in the verse, as well as variants, but I believe this verse brings out the same truth found in Matt. 18:20 in regard to making decisions in the promised presence of Christ.

II Corinthians 2:10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes **in the presence of Christ**. NKJV

Paul is not saying that he forgives because he alone is in Christ's presence, but he is forgiving the brother because the Assembly was also in Christ's presence. In other words, they were gathered together in the Name of Christ, which, according to the general principle of Matt. 18:20, meant that Christ Jesus was in their midst, and so, because of this, Paul could confidently add his forgiveness to theirs because Christ had first forgiven the repentant brother. The forgiveness of Christ had been made known to the Church, so Paul makes known his forgiveness to them also, in the same way he made known to them his first decision in regard to the situation in Corinth, when they were gathered together in the name of the Lord, i.e. his decision to deliver the sinning brother to Satan (I Cor. 5:4-5).

The NASB, following a variant, translates it this way.

II Corinthians 2:10 But one whom you forgive anything, I *forgive* also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, *I did it* for your sakes in the presence of Christ, NASB

We can notice by the words in italics that the translators believe we have an ellipsis in the Greek. There is an implied forgiveness done by Paul and so they add in the verb in italics in the phrase, "*I forgive* also." And then in the last part of the verse they add the verb and pronoun, "*I did it*." And so the translators added certain words to make the meaning plain in English.

The only thing I think might help us understand the full import of the verse is to change the phrase “for your sakes” to “on account of,” or, perhaps to “because of,” The *Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* defines the preposition διά with the accusative as follows.

“...with an accusative, used of causation which is not direct and immediate in the production of a result, *on account of, because of, for the sake of, with a view to...*”¹⁷⁷

Therefore I would suggest the following translation.

“But whom you forgive anything, I also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, *I did it* on account of you in the presence of Christ.”

With this slight change we are slightly closer to seeing that maybe Paul was also referring to the Assembly being in the presence of Christ (although one cannot deny the structure is still awkward in English). Why?—because if the Assembly was gathered in the name of Jesus, they would be in the presence of Christ.

The reason I believe this verse has been commonly interpreted as Paul being the only one in the presence of Christ, or the only one acting in the person of Christ, is because many, who hold to that view, begin with a belief in a clergy/laity system, wherein the clergy are a distinct class of men given by God to perform priestly functions on behalf of the laity. But, of course, such priestly functions performed by a clergy on behalf of what they considered to be the laity, were unknown in the early Church. Scripture knows no such system in this dispensation of grace.

In Scripture all believers were revealed to be priests, and the only distinctions between those believers were their spiritual gifts and the manner by which they ministered in the body of Christ. Every believer was expected to perform a priestly function within the Church, not just a certain class of Christians called the clergy. One class of Christians never dispensed grace or the forgiveness of God, upon another class of Christians. Scripture teaches that the clergy is the laity and the laity is the clergy! They are all one and the same as seen in I Peter 2: 9 and I Peter

¹⁷⁷ Harold K. Moulton, ed., *Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1978) pg. 90

5:3. The people are the heritage of God and the heritage of God are the people of God.¹⁷⁸

However, despite the unbiblical nature a clergy/laity system, and the restrictiveness imposed by such a system, many Christians today hold to it, and so they believe that Paul was acting as a member of that clergy in Christ's stead, and in that capacity was remitting the sin of the offending brother.

Unfortunately some use the King James Version to reinforce this view, because of their translation of the Greek word *προσώπῳ* in the verse as *person*, rather than as *sight* or *presence*. The King James Version reads as follows.

II Corinthians 2:10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it in the person of Christ*. KJV

Yet, despite the KJV as a whole, being an excellent and recommended translation, we must not forget that sometimes they were influenced by a clerical mindset that held on to non-biblical doctrine of apostolic succession and sacramental theology.

It is interesting that the earlier Geneva Bible translated the word as “sight,” being less influenced by the sacramental theology of the day. Let me provide that version below with italics added to the text, and with updated spelling. (Remember, words in italics are not in the Greek text but are added for clarity, and for those times in the Greek, when an ellipsis occurs.)

II Corinthians 2:10 To whom you forgive anything, I *forgive* also: for verily if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the sight of Christ. Geneva Version

Now, with this version, if we take out the first verb added for clarity, that being “*forgive*,” and the second added, “*forgave I it*,” also added for clarity as an implied ellipsis in the last phrase, and then replace it with “*it was*,” as the implied ellipsis, I think we will get a little closer to what

¹⁷⁸ For a fuller treatment of this doctrine please see B.P. Harris, *What is Revival? Should Brethren in the Lord Pray for Revival?* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2019) pg. 187-199, also see pg. 74-77—freely available in digital format at <http://www.silicabiblechapel.com/online-e-books.html>

Paul is really saying. Darby provides a translation similar to this in some ways.

II Corinthians 2:10 But to whom ye forgive anything, I also; for I also, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, *it is* for your sakes in *the* person of Christ. (Darby's Version)

As one can see, the “*forgave I it*” of the KJV and the Geneva Version he changes with the ellipsis “*it is*.” But why would the implied ellipsis be in the present tense, when the two previous verbs were referring to events in the past tense? It seems it would be better to supply an ellipsis of “*it was*,” instead. However, I admit one could never be dogmatic as it is an ellipsis and so becomes a matter of contextual interpretation. In any case, now getting back to the Geneva Version as a starting point, assuming these changes are contextually correct, the verse would then appear as follows.

II Corinthians 2:10 To whom you forgive anything, I also: for verily if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave *it*, *it was* for your sakes in the sight of Christ.

With this ellipsis, we can begin to see that it is possible that Paul was indicating that like the Church, he was also forgiving the offending brother in the sight of Christ, or in Christ's presence. For if Paul says in the first phrase that he has also forgiven the one to whom they forgave, he would be saying “I also forgave what you have forgave in the presence of or sight of Christ.” It is almost as if we have a parenthesis in this verse and so that the prepositional phrase is actually construed with the first verb “forgive” (χαρίζεσθε), even though it is separated from it by eleven or twelve words, depending on which text is used (which structure, admittedly, would be unusual, but not necessarily impossible).¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ As an example of another instance of this, according to some interpreters, the last phrase in Rev. 13:8 construes with a verb separated from the phrase by eleven words. Some, such as Bengel, believe that the prepositional phrase construes with γέγραπται (written), rather than the verbal participle immediately preceding it, ἐσφαγμένου (slain). This would also be unusual, but not impossible. In this instance, though, I would disagree with those who construe it with γέγραπται and would instead construe it with the participle “slain,” as do such ones as Alford. But I provided Rev. 13:8 as an example where some believe such a distance between a prepositional phrase and the verb it modifies is possible in Greek constructions. Perhaps, it should also be said, that since I believe the Bible is one collective whole and that each book of the Canon of

In other words, if we now return to the Geneva Version with their elliptical words added back into the text for clarity, it would almost appear as follows in the Greek using parentheses—Ὡ δέ τι χαρίζεσθε, καὶ ἐγώ (καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ εἴ τι κεχάρισμαι, ὃ κεχάρισμαι δι’ ὑμῶν) ἐν προσώπῳ χριστοῦ, and so in English would appear as follows, that is, using English word order—“Now to whom you forgive anything in the sight of Christ, I *forgive* also (for verily if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it*).¹⁸⁰

Thus Paul would be saying that he did the same thing they did, which would be that in the sight or presence of Christ they forgave the offending brother. As such, Paul would be completing “in spirit,” the process he began with them “in spirit, when the discipline was imposed. The first act of discipline, i.e. “his” delivering him to Satan, and “their” removal of the brother from the Assembly, he did with them in spirit, when they were gathered in the name of the Lord. And so now he is ending that first act of discipline—again, when they are gathered in the name of the Lord, and so are in Christ’s presence, as is he also, since he is still with them in spirit. Therefore, just as he began the process with them in the presence of Christ, he finishes the process with them in the presence of Christ, because Christ would be in their midst since in both instances they were gathered in His name.

Therefore, getting back to Matt. 18: 19-20, we see that being gathered together in the name of the Lord becomes a safeguard measure that is given to us by Jesus for any disciplinary action or disciplinary decision that is needed to be made between two believers who are involved in a dispute. In the same way, it becomes a safeguard for the Church, when it

Scripture was never intended to be contextually divorced from the other books of the Bible, that when one comes across a difficult text in the Greek, whether it is Rev. 13:8 or II Cor. 2:10, it is helpful to consider the context of other books dealing with comparative thoughts.. In other words, the context of II Cor. 2:10 cannot be divorced from the context I Cor. 5:3-5 in determining how Paul intended his statement to be understood. In and of itself, I would be hesitant to construe the prepositional phrase in II Cor. 2:10 with a verb at the beginning of the verse, but because Paul said his actions in I Cor. 5:3-5 were done “in spirit” and in tandem with those in Corinth, and because those actions in I Cor. 5:3-5 were done in the presence of Christ, I believe it is not only possible, but also probable that Paul intended the prepositional phrase to be construed with χαρίζεσθε. But, again, I would never be dogmatic.

¹⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that Bloomfield also sees the same parenthesis in the Greek text, although he construes ἐν προσώπῳ χριστοῦ (in the sight of Christ) with the implied χαρίζομαι (I forgive) after καὶ ἐγώ (I also).

hears the case from the two or three witnesses and so must make a decision, after discerning the binding or loosing of heaven

When believers are truly gathered in the name of the Lord, their focus is on the Lord, and upon His nature, character and purpose, and not their own nature, character, or purpose, which now brings us to the third and final safeguard given to us by the Holy Spirit in Scripture, for the true nature, character and purpose of God can only be known by the Word of God.

The exact Greek phrase from Matt. 18:20, “εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα” (in my name) is only used in one other place in the New Testament. It is also used in I Cor. 1:15. However, when we look at the last three words in the phrase “τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα,” which means “my Name,” we find that it is used in one other place in the Bible in Greek, Isa. 48:11, (in the LXX, of course). This is most instructive for it gives us an additional meaning as to what it means to be gathered together “in My Name.”

Isa. 49:11 begins with a statement in verse 1, which sets the context for the verse. Isa. 48:1 reads:

Isaiah 48:1 “Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel And who came forth from the loins of Judah, Who swear by the name of the LORD And invoke the God of Israel, *But* not in **truth** nor in **righteousness**. NASB

This verse tells us that Israel swore by the “Name” of the Lord and invoked the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness. In one sense, we could say, that Israel was claiming to be gathered together in the Name of the Lord. But the Lord says they were not! In fact, and this brings us back to verse 11, he says they were profaning his Name.

Isaiah 48:11 For mine own sake I will do *this* for thee, because my name is profaned; and I will not give my glory to another. (Brenton’s Version)

They were claiming to be acting “in His Name,” yet they were not acting in His Name. Why? The answer comes in verse 18-19.

Isaiah 48:18-19 “If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ “Your descendants would have been like the sand, And your offspring like its grains; Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from My presence.” NASB

They were not acting in His Name because they were not acting in accordance with His commandments. In other words, they were not obeying the commandments of God. If they had obeyed His commandments we are told they would have been righteous. This answers the charge of verse 1, which says they did not swear by the Name of the Lord in **truth** or **righteousness**. If they had been obeying the commandments, they would have been truthful and righteous in their ways, and, the Lord says in verse 19, they would have continued in His presence. In other words, the Lord would have remained in their midst. They would not have to be cut off from His presence. If only they had obeyed His commandments, His Name would have never been profaned.

So, if we in the Church gather together in His name, we must gather together in obedience to His Word. Being gathered together in his Name, means we must do all things according to the Everlasting Word of God. It means we are careful to do more than simply say, “Lord, Lord,” as Israel invoked the Lord, swearing by “the Name of the Lord” (Isa. 48:1). It means we also obey our Lord Jesus’ commandments, one of them, of course, being the passage before us, the procedure given to us by Jesus in Matt. 18: 15-20.

Jesus said:

Luke 6:46-49 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? ⁴⁷ Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:⁴⁸ He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.⁴⁹ But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. KJV

Beloved, this is our final safeguard—to obey the Word of God in all its commandments, exhortations and admonitions. When we are faithful in this, and are gathered together in the Name of the Lord, being careful to obey his Holy Word, trusting in the witness of spiritual men chosen out of the Assembly to adjudicate disputes between brothers, and always being careful to come to unanimity regarding any matter, the Father promised to make known to us the binding or loosing of heaven that will be in accordance, of course, to what He had already revealed in Scripture.

This is so important for if we are not conforming ourselves to the Word of God, our bindings and loosings run the risk of being deficient, void of the affirmation of heaven. Without the affirmation of heaven our bindings and loosings will not be “in **truth** or **righteousness**.” They will simply be the traditions of men, and not the traditions of God; it will be with the judgments of men, not the judgments of God. May that never be, but by God’s grace, may we ever be gathered together in “His Name,” in complete obedience to God’s Word.

The final part of this procedure in Matt. 18:15-20 ends as it began, with the focus on individual sins against another Christian. Peter’s question to Jesus just after the Lord makes known the New Testament procedure for cases or matters arising from individual offences (in contrast to Moses’s commands for the same type of matters or disputes in Deuteronomy 17:8-12) reveals that in his mind he understood our Lord was specifically dealing with those sins against a neighbour and not those sins that were against God or society.

Matt. 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Thus we see within the fuller and final context of the passage, our Lord is not dealing with societal sins or sins against God, sins that in the Old Testament also required death or being cut off from the people, and which in the New Testament required removal or excommunication from the Church, as seen in such verses as I Cor. 5:11-13 and II John 1:9-11. These were sins against a neighbour. And so in that light, Peter’s final thought dealt with the question as to what would happen to an offending brother who listened at the very first and asked for forgiveness, but then continued to repeat the same sin. He was wondering how many times he would have to privately forgive that person, before being able to publically censoring him through the procedure the Lord had just revealed.

It seems that at times Peter could be very impatient and so he put this question to the Lord, because in reality he really wished to publically judge those who tried his patience. The fact that this may have been on Peter’s mind is because of the answer our Lord gave to him in the parabolic form (i.e. from the person in the parable casting the offending brother into prison, which act would have taken an action of public censor and judgment from the civil authorities). So it seems that Peter was anxious to judge such a person and so he wanted to know how long

did he have to put up with such a person before he could simply have him publically censured. Seven times?

Perhaps, Peter had one particular person in mind back in Galilee who tried his patience! In any case, our Lord, knowing this was more than likely on Peter's mind gives an answer that essentially says to Peter, "Peter, you must always forgive him. You can never publically judge him!" Why is that so? The answer is because even if the same brother repeats the same sin against Peter every two minutes of the day, but then repents each time, it would not reach the number of seventy times seven or 490 times a day our Lord says he must be forgiven! This would be 490 cases of individual sins that simply needed to be forgiven and not go through the process of witnesses and then judgment. And, indeed, it showed that these were not sins against God or society which were treated differently, as was with, for example, the case of Ananias and Sapphira, who were publically censured and judged by God after their one and only sin against God, which was lying to the Holy Spirit. This portion of Scripture begins and ends with the focus on individual sins against another and so could not entail any wholesale excommunication.

So, in conclusion, what does Matt. 18:15-20 teach us concerning "binding and loosing."

1) It must be initiated in private by the offended brother. It cannot be initiated by anyone else; the Holy Spirit says the one against whom the sin was committed must be the one to begin the procedure, not someone else, let alone someone from another Assembly. We must follow this if we are to obey God's Word, doing it in His Name. There are other situations where someone other than the offended brother can go to restore one who has sinned (Gal. 6:1), but that is not what the Holy Spirit is teaching in this passage. And even in that other case referenced in Gal. 6:1 it cannot be any Christian who seeks to restore the one sinning, but only a spiritual Christian, not a soulical or carnal Christian.

2) It is dealing with "individual sins," "sins against a neighbor," not societal sins or sectarian or doctrinal sins (per se). Societal sins follow the procedure of I Cor. 5 and doctrinal sins must follow the procedure of Titus 3:5 and II John 9. If it included such sins, then the judgment would have been incumbent upon all to follow, and not just the offended brother as the Holy Spirit commanded in verse 17—**let him be unto thee**. The Holy Spirit would have then used a plural personal pronoun and not the singular personal pronoun (σοι) in the judgment of verse 17. (It is not right to ignore this plain and literal statement and expand this

verse to include the entire Assembly as many of those who followed our brother Darby have done. There is a reason why the Holy Spirit limits it to the offending brother.)

3) If reconciliation is not obtained, the case must be laid out before one or two additional witnesses chosen from the Assembly (vs. 16, cf. vs.19—**two of you**). One cannot skip this process and bring it immediately to the Assembly. It must first go through two or three witnesses.

4) The facts of the case must be established in truth by spiritual Christians, gathered in Jesus name, men who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (vs. 16, cf. vs. 20).

5) In order for it to go to the Assembly the witnesses must first agree on “every matter” and then they must have brought up the “matter” up to the Father in heaven for His binding or loosing, ever trusting that He will reveal to them His judgment in the matter, thereby obtaining the sanction of heaven (vs. 19). If there is not complete unanimity and they make known their decision to the Church anyways, the Assembly runs the risk of not having the affirmation of heaven. If there is not unanimity in the matter, no judgment should be made. The matter should then be left in the hands of God.¹⁸¹

6) And, finally, this procedure must always be done in the Name of Jesus, which means according to His nature and character, which means never in contradiction to the Word of God. This can only be accomplished by walking in close communion with the Lord, so as to be able to clearly hear the Lord’s voice, which means spiritual Christians, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom must be involved in this process, for the “natural,” or “soulical” Christian does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are spiritually discerned.

7) The whole procedure concludes with the individual as it began with the individual. It does not entail wholesale judgments or wholesale excommunication of Assemblies, and should never be used to justify such unbiblical actions.

This last point is so important for many in the past have misused this text and have used it to excommunicate whole Assemblies, claiming to have

¹⁸¹ Remember, though, this deals with individual sins, sins against a neighbour, and not doctrinal or societal sins.

the sanction of heaven and the blessing of God, when in fact they do not because this procedure does not encompass whole groups of believers but individual believers. Jesus very clearly tells us that the judgment extends only to the offended brother. "Let him be to **thee**," which, as we have already said is a singular pronoun (σοι), not a plural pronoun (ὑμῖν). To ignore this and say, "Well, obviously this must mean the whole Church," is nothing but rationalizing away the truth of the text. If that was what our Lord intended, the Holy Spirit could have easily inspired Matthew to write ὑμῖν in the text and not σοι: "...ἔστω ὑμῖν ὥσπερ ὁ ἔθνικὸς καὶ ὁ τελώνης. ("...let him be unto you just as the Gentile and the Tax-collector). Then such a conclusion would be justified.

Beloved, to ignore the plain and simple sense of this verse is to simply interpret the verse in light of an Assembly tradition, which completely contradicts the plain sense of the Word of God. And, as it has always been, traditions of men always invalidate the Word of God. And just as Jesus always opposed such man-made traditions, as they were an affront to the Holy Spirit who inspired men to write the Scripture, so too, today, they must be opposed by every Christian for we are commanded to walk as Jesus walked (I John 2:6). Even though one might say, "Well that is how the Assemblies have always done it," does not make it correct. Christians must rather affirm the Sacred Scripture and bear witness to the truth, by the Spirit of Truth, who will always oppose traditions added to Scripture that simply ignore its plain and literal sense.

There is a reason why the Holy Spirit made this procedure individual, as we have already explained. God is full of mercy. He knows that as sinners, we will continue to make mistakes. The Lord desires reconciliation, harmony and unity for his Assembly. The Lord says the punishment should only extend to the offended brother. The Lord knows best. He is full of wisdom. We should trust in his wisdom and not think, "Well, Lord if the whole Assembly treats him as a Gentile and tax-collector, will he not be restored all the sooner?" Rather, we should ever trust in His ways and be obedient to his commands and not trust in our own logic or human wisdom. Again, living according to his ways and commandments, rather than according to our ways and man-made commandments, insures that we are truly gathered in His Name.

Perhaps, the offending brother, knowing that the entire Assembly agreed with the unanimous judgment of the two or three witnesses along with the other brother, will think to himself, "The rest of the Assembly, even though it judged me, is still loving me. Yes, some are now reticent with me, but they are still doing business with me, even though I know they

believe that I was not being completely honest in my dealings. They still accept invitations to my house; they still are willing to eat with me. I do not understand it. Why?" If he is brought to think this, perhaps, then he will be convicted of his error and repent. Perhaps, such an action by the Assembly will cause him to feel coals of fire upon his head.

Romans 12:20-21 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head ²¹ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. KJV

If only the our brother Darby and the Lord's little flock in times past had closely obeyed God's Word, if only they would have remembered to not be overcome by "the" evil, (for the definite article is there), but rather overcome "the" evil with good, we would not have fallen into such heartache and division.¹⁸²

May the Lord remind us all that love covers a multitude of sins (I Pet. 4:8), and that we are all sinners, even the most spiritual among us, because we all are still in the process of sanctification. May we never be proud (which is a sin, in and of itself), with stones ready to spiritually stone a fellow believer (spiritually speaking), but rather be like our Lord who said to one who was guilty of sin, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more!"

Concluding Remarks

Perhaps, it might be well to make one last concluding remark. One must remember that whether one looks at verse 17 as referring to the individual or to the collective Assembly we must remember that utilization of this portion of Scripture must always be done according to the inspired procedure. The Holy Spirit inspired a divine procedure for the saints to follow in cases of discipline. The procedure is just as inspired as the very words themselves. To ignore or bypass some of these procedures, ignores and bypasses the will of the Holy Spirit, and that can never result in an Assembly's ratification of heaven's binding or loosing. We are told in Scripture it is important to do everything according to the pattern.

Hebrews 8:5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said,

¹⁸² Of course, we are still only talking about those sins that do not require the excommunication of the offending person.

“See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” NKJV

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us NASB

We are told to conform our practices to the practices of the apostles as revealed in Scripture.

Philippians 4:9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you. NASB

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. NASB

These are important points, for the Lord tells us, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” Any declaration of love to the Lord becomes meaningless if we do not follow his instructions, just Paul makes clear in I Cor. 14:37.

1 Corinthians 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. NASB

Any estimation of our own spirituality becomes faulty, if our practices do not follow the practices of Scripture. All things should be based upon, “What saith the Scripture.”

As such, a decision of an Assembly cannot be recognized if it is not done according to the pattern of Scripture. Should it be any other way? We should obey God rather than men.

Therefore, in making one final consideration of these verses in Matt. 18, what do we find the Holy Spirit reveals to us? *We find that in this portion of Scripture all judgments are individual, and only have application to individuals.* We cannot use this portion of Scripture to excommunicate whole Assemblies! We need to base all our practices upon Scripture, asking ourselves, “Where does Scripture show us this practice?” Where in Scripture do we find an example of an Assembly being excommunicated by another Assembly?

If there is, show me the verse and I will bow before the judgment of Scripture, for the judgment of Scripture is the judgment of the Holy Spirit. But if a verse or practice cannot be found, then I will always oppose such an act, for such an act becomes a tradition of man and not the tradition of God, and traditions of men must always be resisted.

If an Assembly was making a decision against another Assembly based upon this portion of Scripture in Matthew 18, they would have to bring every single individual of the Assembly before them to make the judgment, after following all the procedures. Of course, we are addressing this from the perspective of those who think this passage of Scripture deals with excommunication. In reality, as we have seen, it does not. Nowhere does this passage say to “remove” the unyielding brother. In this point alone, this Scripture has been misused, making it say something it does not. But what we are saying to those who think it does, that they should realize these judgments are individual and not corporate, and if one applies it to the wholesale excommunication of an Assembly, they are equally disobeying this Scripture, ignoring the procedure established by the Holy Spirit.

Thus (despite the fact that this does not apply to excommunication), if this portion of Scripture was still used in the past to excommunicate an entire Assembly because they did not acquiesce to a decision another Assembly had made, they are not following Scripture, but are exceeding what is written and are making decisions that do not have the blessing of heaven. The Holy Spirit will never sanction something that does not agree with Scripture. That is how we test the spirits – what saith the Scripture? So if an Assembly “A” wanted to excommunicate another Assembly “B,” they must realize Scripture never sanctions such an act. Only individuals can be excommunicated and that is by following the commands of other Scriptures, not Matt. 18:15-20.

And, if some disagree, nothing can stop them, but perhaps, they will at least obey Scripture and understand that if they desire Assembly B is to be considered “put out,” then the people in the Assembly B must first be in contact with Assembly A, then an individual brother or sister in Assembly A must be offended by those persons from Assembly B, and then one must begin the procedures enumerated above. Then this must be repeated for every single person of Assembly B, if the entire Assembly is to be considered put out. Scripture does not allow a decision against one brother of Assembly B to be applied to all other individuals of Assembly B, unless a procedure is begun by each and every individual of Assembly B.

But someone might say, “That is too tedious to bring every individual to judgment.” It is much easier to just excommunicate the entire Assembly. But when are we told we can ignore the injunctions of Scripture for our ease or because of our discomfort? Perhaps, God made it this tedious and exacting to keep false judgments and pronouncements from being

made! If a person or an Assembly ignores this procedure you can be assured they do not have the affirmation of heaven and are not acting spiritually, but are acting carnally or soulically. Why? Because a spiritual person will recognize and obey the commandments of the Lord, and Matthew 18:15-22 most assuredly is a commandment of the Lord (see I Cor. 14:47; Matt. 28:20; John 14:13).

I Corinthians 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. KJV

Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen. KJV

John 14:13-14 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*. ¹⁵ If ye love me, keep my commandments. KJV

We cannot claim to be spiritual, acting in His Name, if we ignore his commandments or if we disobey his commandments. And this individual procedure in Matt. 18:15-22 is a commandment of the Lord.

I have heard many Christians boast that the Roman Catholic Church follows the tradition of men, but we follow Scripture. May such a declaration be true! But we must all be so careful to make sure that such a declaration is not an empty declaration, for I am afraid that some Christians who make such a claim are simply following a “different” set of traditions. We may not don robes, or burn incense, or elevate a man to be a sole bishop, but the traditions of men include more than those outward things. A “tradition of man” is anything that is not a “tradition of God” and a “tradition of God” is only that which can be found in Scripture! If any dogma or practice cannot be found in Scripture, then our boast becomes an empty boast, and if that is so, may the Lord forgive us all.

So dear brethren, may we encourage each other to, “search the Scriptures,” for that will be our safety from error and our gateway to testimony. A testimony without the sanction of Scripture is no testimony at all, but is simply a symptom of our own ignorance, arrogance and apathy.

Of this, we are all guilty! We deceive ourselves if we think otherwise. We have all fallen prey to ignorance. We have all fallen prey to

arrogance, and, most certainly, we have all fallen prey to the apathy that ignores the literal parameters and procedures of God's Word.

But our God is merciful and forgiving. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin! Oh, how glorious! Our goal should not be the defense of our own innocence, for there is none good, no not one, but our goal should be to ever bow before the illumination of the Spirit when he pulls aside the curtain of our fallen hearts to show us our failings. And in so doing we should never forget that deeper than our ugly failings is the beauty of the Saviour who is ever ready and willing to shine out from our spirits in all His glory and might. That is true testimony.

Heretical Sins—Titus 3:10-11

Titus 3:10-11 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; ¹¹ Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. KJV

Now that we have finished examining those two leading sections of Scripture, dealing with Assembly discipline, the first resulting in excommunication and the second that did not result in excommunication, let us now examine the remaining verses of Scripture dealing with Church discipline, the first being Titus 3:10-11. This text in Titus is similar to our text in II John 1:9-11 in that it is dealing with a worker exercising spiritual authority among a number of Assemblies that he was involved in with ministry.

We will examine this passage of Scripture from three aspects.

- 1) The Position of Titus—what was the basis of Titus being called to exercise such discipline by Paul. Why was he able to exercise such authority? What position did he serve in among the Assemblies?
- 2) The Reason for Discipline—what was the cause for such discipline. In other words, what was the person teaching or doing that required such discipline?
- 3) The Judgment Rendered—what was the nature of the discipline. In other words, did it result in excommunication?

So with that laid out let us begin with the nature of Titus' position among the Churches. Perhaps, it might be helpful if we provide some of our comments about Titus from volume one.

1) The Position of Titus

“In Titus 1:5 we are told that Titus was personally left by Paul in Crete. This is important for it tells us that Paul and Titus were in the “work” together. The usual interpretation of this verse is that Titus was acting as an “apostolic delegate” and thus had authority from Paul to appoint

elders throughout the island of Crete. However, this designation is a misnomer. There is no such thing as an “apostolic delegate” in Scripture. One will fail to find this title. This title presumes a structured hierarchy where one has authority to delegate to another the authority to represent that person. In other words, a delegate is one who operates “in the name” of another. Since we have no biblical word applicable to this designation in Scripture, we are left with an English definition of the word. Webster’s defines the word as “A person appointed and sent by another with powers to transact business in his stead.”¹⁸³

Thus, when this nomenclature is applied to Titus, people are saying that authority was given to Titus by Paul to act in his name. The term implies a transference of power or authority (much like was found with Moses and Joshua—Num. 27:20). Yet this notion is completely contradicted by Scripture.

Paul never implies that Titus was acting in Paul’s name. In fact, the complete opposite is the truth. Paul sends Titus out in Titus’ own name or authority. We see this by looking closely to Paul’s instructions to Titus in the Epistle to Titus 1:5.

Titus 1:5 Τούτου χάριν κατέλιπόν σε ἐν Κρήτῃ, ἵνα τὰ λείποντα ἐπιδιορθώσῃ, καὶ καταστήσῃς κατὰ πόλιν πρεσβυτέρους, ὡς ἐγὼ σοι διαταξάμην·

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you-- NKJV

The key word in this passage is the Greek word ἐπιδιορθώσῃ (should set in order). This Greek verb is a second person subjective aorist middle verb, and it is this verb which negates any notion that Titus was an “apostolic delegate” sent out in the name and with the authority of the apostle Paul. Henry Alford in commenting on this verbal form states the following.

“...the middle implies that the subject uses his own agency: *facit per se*: see Kruger, *Griechische Sprachlehre*, p. 363, who calls this the *dynamic* middle...”
184

¹⁸³ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (J. P. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1857) pg. 275

¹⁸⁴ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, Vol. III* (Rivingtons, London, 1865) pg. 410

In this quote, Alford uses the Latin phrase, *facit per se* which means “does it himself.” In other words, to put it all into English, Alford would be saying: “the middle implies that the subject uses his own agency (i.e. does it himself).” More than likely, this phrase might have been taken from the well-known Latin legal term: *Qui facit per alium facit per se*, which is defined in various law journals and dictionaries as follows—

“He who does a thing through another does it himself. Cochran's Law Lexicon. We find in Judge Cooley's work on Torts (3rd Ed., p. 1016) a statement of the doctrine made with admirable simplicity. He lays as the foundation for the master's liability, the maxim: *Qui facit per alium facit per se*; which he renders freely as meaning that that which the superior has put the inferior in motion to do, must be regarded as done by the superior himself.”¹⁸⁵

Now, if one wanted to adopt a term that would be applicable to the concept of an apostolic delegate, this would be the term. It would mean Paul was the one doing the appointing of elders, through Titus who was acting in his stead. That would, indeed define an “apostolic delegate.” But Alford does not quote the full maxim; he quotes only the last phrase, *facit per se*, because Paul uses a verbal form that disallows any thought that Paul was doing something through Titus, or that Titus was acting an apostolic delegate. This verbal form must explain why Alford chose to only quote the last part of the maxim, *facit per se*, “he does by himself,” for the first part cannot apply.

This verb—ἐπιδιορθώσῃ (should set in order)—is the middle form of the verb, and, as Alford states above, it implies the subject is acting under his own agency. This type of middle, called by Alford a “dynamic middle,” is also sometimes called an “intensive middle,” or a “subjective middle.” James Robinson Boise, in his Greek Grammar, defines it as follows:

“The middle voice in Greek has three uses: It represents the subject as acting (a) upon himself directly (direct middle); (b) to or for himself (indirect middle); (c) **with his own means or powers (subjective middle).**”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Fred P. Caldwell, *The Kentucky Judicial Dictionary: Being a Compilation of All Words, Phrases and Maxims which Have Been Defined, Construed, Interpreted Or Applied in Reported Kentucky Cases, and in Kentucky Constitution, Statutes and Codes of Practice, Volume 3* (W. H. Anderson Company, Cincinnati, 1916) pg. 2793

¹⁸⁶ James Robinson Boise, Judson Gregory Pattengill, *First Lessons in Greek: Adapted to the Grammar of Goodwin, and to that of Hadley as Revised by Frederic D. Forest Allen* (S. C. Griggs and Company, Chicago, 1889) pg. 36-37

And James Hadley in his Greek Grammar said this.

“The Subjective Middle represents **the subject as acting with his own means and powers**, and differs but slightly from the active: *παρέχειν to furnish in any way, παρέχεσθαι to afford from one's own property; ποιεῖν πόλεμον to make war simply, ποιεῖσθαι to make war with one's own resources...*”¹⁸⁷

In addition, Ellicott says this about the dynamic (subjective) middle. (He is speaking in reference to another verse, but it is no less applicable, since he is still speaking of the Greek subjective or dynamic middle voice.

“In this form of the middle voice, somewhat conveniently termed by Kruger (Sprachl. § 51. 8) the ‘dynamic’ middle,’ the reference to the powers put forth by the subject is more distinct than in the act[ive], which simply states the action. Such delicate shades of meaning can scarcely be expressed in translation, but no less exist.”¹⁸⁸

Ellicott makes an important statement when he says, “such delicate shades of meaning can scarcely be expressed in translation, but no less exist.” This is the difficulty of translation of one language into another. Many times this cannot be accomplished without further elucidation outside the actual translation. This, I believe, is true with Paul’s use of ἐπιδιορθώση (should set in order). It is the shade of meaning that is found in the dynamic middle, ἐπιδιορθώση (should set in order), that completely contradicts the whole concept of “apostolic delegate,” simply because Titus was “commanded” by Paul, by the use of the Greek middle voice, to act under his own power! There is no such “delegating” of apostolic authority to Titus in this verse. Titus was a fellow worker in the “work;” he possessed his own authority from the Lord to act apart from Paul. In fact, later Paul instructs Titus to not let anyone despise his authority which he received from the Lord.

Titus 2:15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. KJV

¹⁸⁷ James Hadley, Frederic de Forest Allen, ed., *A Greek grammar for schools and colleges: revised and in part rewritten by Frederic de Forest Allen* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1884) pg. 261

¹⁸⁸ Charles John Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon* (J. W. Parker & Son, London, 1857) pg. 192

Titus was given his own spiritual authority from the Holy Spirit when he was set apart into the work. He needed no delegated authority from Paul. He functioned under the authority of the Lord and so appointed elders under his own “agency,” using Alford terminology. Yes, indeed, Scripture says Paul commanded Titus to appoint elders, but what most forget is that he commanded Titus to appoint elders **under his own power, agency or authority**. This is the significance of the Greek middle in this particular verse.

It is almost as if Paul was doing the same thing with Titus that he did with Timothy (cf. I Tim. 4:12-16; II Tim. 1:6-7). He was encouraging him to not ignore the gifts and authority which were given to him by the Lord; he was encouraging a young worker in the Lord to fulfill his ministry (cf. II Tim. 4:5).

Yes, Paul would give commands in the work to both Titus and Timothy, but it was done with the spiritual authority given to Paul by the Lord, and not by a hierarchical or a formal ecclesiastical authority that he possessed. That type of authority structure was not introduced into the Church until after the death of the apostles. It did not exist in the early Church. The apostles would act with a spiritual or moral authority (which all would be wise to heed) but they never exercised a formal hierarchical authority. They did not act like *Benefactors*, who would dole out measured benefits intended to indebt and control the ones receiving the favors, nor did they act like that of *kings* who would not only make commands, but would also physically enforce those commands given. Rather they followed the command of the Lord Jesus in Luke 22:25 to not be thus.

Luke 22:25-26 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. ²⁶ **But ye shall not be so:** but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. KJV

The only formal, hierarchical, authority that the apostles ever recognized within the Church was that of the King of kings and Lord of lords; they trusted in Him to discipline His sheep, whenever their own spiritual injunctions and spiritual commands might be ignored. They could and would deliver one to Satan when needed (I Cor. 5:5), but if their injunction was ignored they would not tear out the tare by the roots (Matt. 13:28-29). Spiritual authority commands, but cannot physically enforce, whereas hierarchical authority, not only commands, it also

physically enforces (and, indeed, has done so throughout Church history).

Paul was no autocrat, dictating commands; he understood the one who dictates is the Lord. Paul was given authority from the Lord to build up and not destroy (II Cor. 13:8). As such, Paul was humble and was very careful to not use this authority in an autocratic manner; he was careful to ever follow the command of his Master and not act with a dictatorial spirit—

Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them.²⁶ “It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant. NASB

II Cor. 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

I Thess. 2:6-7 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷ But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. NASB

Phm. 1:8-9 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*-- being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— NKJV

In fact, Paul knew he could not act in an autocratic manner, for he had no authority, in and of himself, per se (II Cor. 13:2-3). It was the authority of the Lord working within him. (Oh, how this truth had been forgotten so many times by men who have been placed in positions of responsibility.)

So, in conclusion we see that there is no such thing in Scripture as an “apostolic delegate.” Titus acted under his own authority that, like Paul himself, he received from the Lord, as a worker of God, and, as such, was responsible for appointing elders within the Churches (by discerning the ones who had already been made elders by the Holy Spirit) which act was the outworking of his continued responsibility of “equipping the saints.”

Suffice it to say that those in the work like unto Titus would be those who have been set apart into the work of the Lord to preach the gospel and establish Churches in places where none exist. In other words, a

worker like Titus today would be called by some a pioneer missionary. And the same type of authority, that one like Titus possessed, would be possessed by the pioneer missionary. Such a missionary might be sent into a country or part of a country where no Church exists. He preaches the gospel and souls are saved. A Church is established and the missionary as an evangelist or teacher instructs the new Christians in the things of the Lord. Then, when the time comes and he recognizes that the Holy Spirit has made certain men into elders, the missionary “proves” such men by the instructions left by Paul (found in Scripture) and by the discernment of the Holy Spirit; and then, after proving, the missionary then establishes those men as elders in the Churches, just like Titus did in Crete.

This type of missionary is not an apostolic delegate, but is a worker set apart into the work with the gift and authority of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel, lay the foundation of a Church and then build up the saints in the Church. And, just like Titus before, such a worker has an extra-local authority and ministry given to him by the Holy Spirit and so is moved on to continue the spread of the gospel and then repeat the process all over again in another place, setting in order what is lacking, making sure each Assembly ultimately has godly men who are proved or recognized as elders after they have been made elders by the Holy Spirit.

In this light, we can see the position of Titus among the Assemblies and why Titus was called to reject a heretic after the first and second warning. As a worker he exercised a spiritual authority among many Churches before and during the time that a formal and recognized authority of bishops was established among those Churches. It would be no different than a missionary today traveling to a place where there were no Churches, who then preached the gospel, saw many souls saved, and then showed them all how to gather in the name of the Lord as a local Church. And then, as the worker in that particular area he would travel among the various Assemblies as the missionary that he was encouraging them to continue on with the Lord and over time help them

¹⁸⁹ B. P. Harris, *Church Principles of the New Testament, Vol. I* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2015) pg. 304-311

recognize those whom the Holy Spirit appointed to be elders within each Assembly. However, until that time came that such elders were recognized, all the saints in the various Assemblies would look to him to handle doctrinal situations that might arise in their midst. This would be most natural for since this was a work in a place where Christ was not named, and many were from among the Gentiles, many of those saints would have been pagans just a few months or years before. They would not yet have the maturity to deal with such doctrinal questions, let alone discerning the leaven of heresy. Thus, Paul was saying that Titus during that intermediate time would have to be the one to reject a heretic.

After elders were established, that responsibility to deal with heretics would become the responsibility of those elders who appointed to oversee the flock. Titus might still be called upon (as would a missionary) to help and to discern certain teachings, but as Titus's authority was not formal or spiritual, the elders would have to concur and be the ones to reject the heretic.

In this sense, Titus 3:10-11 is unlike Matt. 18:15-22. There is not procedure to follow for Titus was not dealing with individual sins against a neighbour, but was dealing with sins, primarily against God, and those divisions resulting from that sin. As such, the discernment needed to make such judgments in those early days of the Churches, resided in one who was mature in the things of the Faith, who was the co-worker of the apostle Paul—Titus. In today's world, under similar conditions, it would be the missionary in the field. And so this leads us into now considering the reason for such discipline. In other words, what was the person teaching or doing that required such discipline?

2) The Reason for Discipline

In the King James Version we are told that Titus was to reject a "heretick" (αἰρετικός). John Gill has an excellent comment on this verse regarding such a one. He states:

"An heretic, according to the notation of the word, is either one that makes choice of an opinion upon his own judgment, contrary to the generally received sense of the churches of Christ, and prefers it to theirs, and obstinately persists in it; separates from them, forms a party, and sets himself at the head of them, whom he has drawn into the same way of thinking with himself: or he is one that removes and takes away a fundamental doctrine of Christianity, which affects particularly the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity, and personality of Father, Son, and Spirit, and especially the doctrines relating to the person, office, and grace of Christ; one that brings in, or receives damnable doctrines; speaks or professes

perverse things, and draws away disciples after him; or is among such disciples: for though schism and heresy do differ, and every schismatic may not be an heretic, yet every heretic is a schismatic; he makes a rent in the doctrine of Christ, and makes parties and divisions in his church; and such are not always to be contended and disputed with, but to be avoided and rejected.”¹⁹⁰

And W. E. Vine relates the following regarding the Greek word αἵρεσις (heresy) which is the cognate noun of the adjective αἱρετικός (heretick) used in this verse.

“Denotes (a) a choosing, choice (from *haireomai*, to choose); then, that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects, Galatians 5:20 (marg., ‘parties’); such erroneous opinions are frequently the outcome of personal preference or the prospect of advantage.”¹⁹¹

As one can see there is a difference of emphasis between W. E. Vine and John Gill regarding what constitutes heresy. W.E. Vine focuses on the underlying nature of the word in its most general sense, whereas John Gill relates it more to those false doctrines and perversions of the fundamental doctrines of the Faith.

The Greek word itself does not indicate what the opinion is, or what constitutes the heresy. It only bespeaks the fact that an opinion, which W. E. Vine correctly identifies as a self-willed opinion, exists. It refers to a thought or an opinion, around which a sect is formed, which, ultimately, leads to a rent in the body of Christ. This is the sense that

¹⁹⁰ Gill, John, *AN EXPOSITION OF THE OLD and NEW TESTAMENT; in which THE SENSE OF THE SACRED TEXT IS GIVEN; Doctrinal and practical truths are set forth in plain and easy light; DIFFICULT PASSAGES EXPLAINED; SEEMING CONTRADICTIONS RECONCILED; and whatever is material in the various Readings and several Oriental Versions is observed. THE WHOLE ILLUSTRATED WITH NOTES, TAKEN FROM THE MOST ANCIENT JEWISH WRITINGS. IN NINE VOLUMES*, Edited and revised and updated by Larry Pierce, 1994-1995. Assisted by Tom Cox, Earnie Stefanik, Paul Houghton, and Peter Robinson, and Jay Sklar, and Damaris Martin, Kerri Playford and Lori Hoffman, and others., (Printed for Mathews and Leigh, 18 Strand, by W. Clowes, Northumberland-Court, London, 1809), Digital copy sourced from: Online Bible Edition, Version 2.00.04 June 21, 2006 Copyright © 1992-2006 Importantia!

¹⁹¹ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. II, pg. 217

John Gill refers to when he states, “Every schismatic may not be an heretic, yet every heretic is a schismatic.”

Heresy in its most general sense does not, necessarily, identify the actual content of the underlying thought behind the schism; it only refers to a thought or opinion that becomes the driving force for a schism. However, over time, the word in the New Testament became more and more associated with false doctrine, rather than simply a self-willed opinion.

Thus, early on in the New Testament, Paul could use the word, ἁρεσις (heresy), not of false doctrine, but of opinions based upon one’s economic status, resulting in divisions and discriminations (I Cor. 11:18-21).¹⁹²

I Corinthians 11:18-21 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.¹⁹ For there must be also **heresies** among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. KJV

There were differences of opinion in the Church in Corinth, but not (at least at that time) departures of the Faith. Those who were holding to heresies were still sound in the Faith, but were clearly carnal in their opinions regarding one’s class and economic status, as well as one’s preference for Christian leader. More than likely this would have also been the primary understanding of the word as Paul used in in Gal. 5: 19-20.

Galatians 5:19-20 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, KJV

In those early days of the Church the word simply referred to those who grouped together around a common opinion or interpretation of Scripture. It did not refer to false doctrines, per se, or departures from the Faith. Each group (usually Gentile Christians or Jewish Christians) could be sound in the fundamental doctrines of God and of Scripture, although widely divergent in their practice of those doctrines. In this sense, it is no different than many Christian denominations of our day. Generally speaking, they are all fundamental in the Faith, though widely divergent

¹⁹² Additionally, Paul could have also had those party spirits in his mind, that existed within the Church of Corinth, those who followed Peter, and those who followed Paul, and still others who followed Apollos (I Cor. 1:12).

in their interpretations of those non-essential doctrines found in Scripture that do not affect our salvation. This does not mean such formations are alright, it simply means they allow a common opinion or interpretation of Scripture to become the basis of their gathering, or Church.

However, by the time we get to the later days of the Church in the New Testament we begin to see a semantic shift in the meaning of the word, at least in Christian circles. We find the word “heresy” becoming more and more associated with those evil and false doctrines that were contrary to the Faith, so much so, that Peter in his second epistle labels them as “damnable heresies, which included denying the Lord.”

II Peter 2:1 But there were **false prophets** also among the people, even as there shall be **false teachers** among you, who privily shall bring in **damnable heresies, even denying the Lord** that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. KJV

So we see that in just a few decades, there was a narrowing of the word’s usage within Christian circles. In the beginning it was used in its most general sense as was found in the Epistle to the Galatians (c. 48-52 AD) and in the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (c.54 AD). However, as the Church continued to grow, and false prophets began to emerge, along with false teachers, the word came to be associated more and more with those men who introduced strange and evil doctrines regarding the nature of Christ into the Church, bringing confusion, deception, and division to the body of Christ . In just a few short years the devil had so successfully introduced these false prophets and false teachers into the Church that Peter in his second epistle (c. 66 AD) had to give a special warning to the saints of God regarding them and their evil doctrines, which Peter named *damnable heresies*.

Then after a few more years we see the apostle John also warning the saints regarding these false prophets with their evil doctrines in his first epistle (c. 90AD), making known to the saints that they were not of God but of the spirit of the antichrist.

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. ² Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: ³ And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. KJV

And then in his second epistle, the apostle John had to make sure such men were never allowed to be received into the Church, let alone be allowed to remain in the Church, and/or to be given any type of Godspeed.

II John 1:9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹ For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. KJV

And then, finally, we see this semantic shift of the word heresy (and heretic) away from its more general meaning, to its more highly restrictive meaning of evil doctrine regarding the nature of Christ solidified in the extra-biblical literature of the Church. Ignatius speaks of heresy in this restrictive sense, as did Irenaeus a few years later. Ignatius says the following in his epistle to the Ephesians (c. 107 AD).

Ignatius to the Ephesians 6:2; 7:1 Now Onesimus of his own accord highly praiseth your orderly conduct in God, for that ye all live according to truth, and that **no heresy hath a home among you**: nay, ye do not so much as listen to any one, if he speak of aught else save concerning **Jesus Christ in truth**. For some are wont of malicious guile to hawk about the Name, while they do certain other things unworthy of God. **These men ye ought to shun**, as wild-beasts; for they are mad dogs, biting by stealth; against whom ye ought to be on your guard, for they are hard to heal ¹⁹³

And then Irenaeus (ca. 120-200 AD), who was born a few years after Ignatius death, wrote of Polycarp (ca. 69 – 165 AD), an earlier Christian, whom he met as a young man. This Polycarp, himself, knew some of the apostles, and was taught by the Apostle John himself. Regarding this Polycarp, Irenaeus relates the following story regarding his encounter with the heretic Marcion, to which story, Irenaeus applies Titus 3:10.

“But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed his life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down and which alone are true...[He was a man] who was of much greater weight, and a

¹⁹³ Joseph Barber Lightfoot, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: a Revised Text with Introductions, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations, Part II, Vol. II, Sec. I* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1885) pg. 541

more stedfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, **and the rest of the heretics**....And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, 'Dost thou know me?' 'I do know thee, the first born of Satan.' Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth; as Paul also says, '**A man that is a heretic**, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.'

¹⁹⁴

And then in another place Irenaeus, also applies this same understanding of heresy not only to Titus 3:10, but also to II John 1:10-11.

"I .know well indeed that thou, beloved, going over all this, wilt greatly ridicule this madness of theirs, so wise in its own conceit...And as many as withdraw from the Church, and have faith in these old wives' fables, verily they are self-condemned. Whom Paul commands us *after a first and second admonition to reject*. But John, the Disciple of the Lord, hath enhanced their condemnation, not willing that so much as 'Hail' should be said by us to them. For *he*, saith he, *that biddeth them Hail, is partaker of their' evil deeds.*"

¹⁹⁵

Consequently, in light of this semantic shift of the word, which began even during the later days of the New Testament Church when the word was used by Peter in regard to those evil doctrines, which he called **damnable heresies**, we can see that Paul in his *Epistle to Titus* (c. 65 AD), which was written about the same time as Peter's second epistle (c.66 AD), more than likely intended this word (or I should say its cognate form) to be used with its heightened sense of evil doctrine. Thus it seems the King James Versions translation of "heretic" (heretick) is, indeed, the better translation of αἰρετικόν. Or, at the minimum, for those who still prefer the modern understanding of αἰρετικόν as "divisive," or "factious," one cannot discount the King James viewpoint of it as one who held false and evil doctrines.

In fact, the likelihood of Paul utilizing αἰρετικόν in its more heightened sense of false doctrine becomes all the more apparent when we consider that Paul's references these false teachers a few verses earlier in his epistle to Titus, as well as in his two other Epistles to Timothy, written in somewhat the same time period as Titus. Consider all these verses in

¹⁹⁴ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1985) pg. 187

¹⁹⁵ Irenaeus, John Keble, tr., *Five Books of S. Irenaeus: Bishop of Lyons, Against Heresies* (James Parker and Co., London, 1872) pg. 56-57

the immediate context of Titus 3:10, and in the greater context of this time period of the Church.

Titus 1:9-16 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by **sound doctrine** both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. ¹⁰ For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: ¹¹ Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. ¹² One of themselves, *even* a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians *are* alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. ¹³ This witness is true. **Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;** ¹⁴ Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, **that turn from the truth.** ¹⁵ Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. ¹⁶ **They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him,** being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work **reprobate.** KJV

Notice in this opening portion of his epistle to Titus he refers to “**sound doctrine**,” and then to the “**Faith**,” and then to those “**who turn from the Truth**,” which Young’s Version translates as those “**turning themselves away from the Truth**.” Then, notice that he makes known that they **profess to know God**, which he then nullifies by calling them **reprobate!** This is a true picture of a “heretick.”

And now, notice these verses in his Epistles to Timothy, which were written around the same time as his Epistle to Titus; we see more references to evil men, who were teaching false and pernicious doctrines. This was a time of great spiritual warfare in the Church. The spirit of the antichrist was in full attack mode. Heresies (self-willed opinions) that were considered carnal in the early days of the Church, but free from any departures from the Faith, were now becoming heresies, or self-willed opinions that were rife with evil and false doctrines far from the Truth—doctrines full of lies, having no connection to the Faith or the Truth.

I Timothy 1:3-4, 18-20 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest **charge some that they teach no other doctrine,** ⁴ Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: *so do.* ¹⁸ This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; ¹⁹ **Holding faith, and a good conscience;** which some **having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:** ²⁰ Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have **delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.** KJV

II Timothy 3:1-2, 5-10, This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ² For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, **blasphemers**, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ⁵ **Having a form of godliness**, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. ⁶ For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ⁷ Ever learning, and **never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**. ⁸ Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, **so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith**. ⁹ But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all *men*, as theirs also was. ¹⁰ But **thou hast fully known my doctrine**, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience. KJV

II Timothy 4:1-4 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;² Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;⁴ **And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.** KJV

Notice the same recurring words and phrases as found in Titus—**doctrine**, the phrase **concerning faith** (lit. concerning the Faith), the word **blaspheme**, and the phrases—having a **form of godliness**, never able to come to **the knowledge of the truth**, **these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith**, [turning] **away...from the truth, unto fables**.

All these words bespeak “heresy” in the modern sense of the word.

Finally, this meaning becomes all the more apparent when we consider the other words Paul uses in defining such “heretics.”

Titus 3:11 knowing that such a man **is perverted** and is sinning, being self-condemned. NASB

Titus 3:11 having known that **he hath been subverted** who *is* such, and doth sin, being self-condemned. Young’s Literal Translation

He says that such were “subverted,” or as in some translations, “perverted.” Regarding this Greek word, ἐκστρέφω, inflected in the verse as ἐξέστραπται, a perfect passive 3rd person singular indicative verb, Liddell and Scott offer this—

“ἐκστρέφω, fut. ψω, *to turn out of*, βόθρου τ' ἐξέστρεψε [δένδρον] *rooted up a tree from the trench it stood in*, I. 17. 58. II. *to turn inside out*, τὰ βλέφαρα Ar. Pl. 721 : metaph. *to change or alter entirely*, τοὺς τρόπους Ar. Nub. 88.”¹⁹⁶

The word is formed by the preposition ἐκ “out” and the verb στρέφω “turn.” And, as mentioned above, it is a perfect passive verb, which indicates the action of the verb occurred before with results extending into the present time of Paul’s writing. This is why Young’s Literal Translation renders it as “hath been subverted.” He emphasizes the past action of subversion, whereas many other translations emphasize the same perversion, but in its present state. Of all the words that Paul could use (e.g. corrupt, see I Tim. 6:5) it is interesting that he would choose this word. It is almost as if one could imagine that in Paul’s mind such a heretic is already “turned out,” being condemned of himself when he chose to depart from the Faith. In one sense, one could imagine that Paul is implying that the heretic is already considered excommunicated by his own self-will that subverted the Truth.

Or, perhaps, we might consider it another way. Robertson describes the verb as follows—

“**Is perverted** (ἐξέστραπται). Perfect passive indicative of ἐκστρέφω, old word *to turn inside out, to twist, to pervert*. Only here in N.T.”¹⁹⁷

In this sense, one could imagine that Paul was saying that by the heretic’s own actions, he has turned himself “inside out.” In other words, he pretends to know God, as Paul first states in Titus 1:16, but here his true colors are shown because of his corrupt doctrines and his corrupt actions. He tries to clothe himself in religious garb, but by his own “subversion,” he has turned him inside out. His true corrupt nature is laid bare and so is *condemned of himself* for all to see.

So in conclusion, we see that in the early days of the Church in the New Testament the word was used of differing interpretations, class distinctions, and party spirits without any sense of heresy in the sense of the word today. However, as one continues to read the New Testament one begins to see a semantic shift, whereas, by the time we get to the latter part of the New Testament we see that the word was used of

¹⁹⁶ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, Seventh Edition* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1883) pg. 444

¹⁹⁷ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. IV* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1931) pg. 608

pernicious doctrines and damnable heresies concerning the nature of Christ Jesus. As such, when Paul used the word in its adjectival form, he, indeed, was speaking of “hereticks,” those who had left the Faith, those who taught strange and pernicious doctrines, and those who were corrupt and in all things reprobate. As such, they were in need of being rejected by Titus, until the appointed elders in the Churches could shepherd the flock of God, themselves, as bishops overseeing the Church of God, being watchful to protect it from those wolves in sheep’s clothing.

3) The Judgment Rendered

Finally, we will look at the judgment rendered. To do so, we must first begin by looking at Greek word translated “reject” in the King James Version. The Greek word is the word *παραιτέομαι*. It is a word with multiple meanings, and, as such, one must be careful to not assume that because it is translated one way in one verse it is allowable to translate it the same way in another verse. Its meaning must be determined by its context. However, the meaning in most contexts will begin with some type of existing relationship. In some cases, the context will involve a loose type of relationship. In other contexts, it will involve a very close relationship. But in almost all contexts there will be some type of relationship that will be affected by the action of the verb.

Moreover, if the context bespeaks a situation involving a greater authority, the word in the New Testament will carry the connotation of a “request,” or of an “entreaty” (e.g. Mark 15:6 NA28, Heb. 12:19). However, if the word occurs in a negative context, the same word will carry the connotation of a “severance” of relationship, or of a “rejection” or “refusal” of acceptance. One should never conclude that because one Greek word means one thing in one verse it must mean the same thing in another verse. Context must determine the meaning of the word. It is no different in English. In English, we also have words that are spelled and pronounced the same way but carry either a positive connotation or negative connotation, all depending on the context. These fall into the category of words called contronyms.

For example, consider the sentence, “He was sanctioned.” Is the verb being used in a positive sense or a negative sense? One would not know without further context. The verb “sanction” in English can mean two different things—1) *to be authorized*, or 2) *to be penalized*. But after we add a little context to the sentence we find that we are able to understand which meaning is being used. For example, the verb is being used in its

positive sense if we add this context to the sentence—”He was sanctioned by the court to be the guardian of the little child.”

Yet when the very same word is used in a different contextual setting, one can see that it is being used in an opposite way, in a negative sense, as can be seen if we add this to the sentence—”He was sanctioned by the court and fined a hundred dollars.” Thus, one can see that sometimes context becomes the only way one can determine the correct meaning of a word. The same is true of our Greek word translated “reject.”

In the King James Version the word is translated as “reject” in accordance with the surrounding negative context. This is reinforced by Paul’s usage of the Greek word translated as “heretick.” On the other hand, one will notice that many modern versions translate the verb as “refuse,” also because of the surrounding negative context, but with a sense of less restrictiveness, perhaps because of their different understanding of the Greek word αἰρετικὸν, which they translate as “divisive,” or “factious,” rather than heretic.

However, because we have shown that Paul was referring to *heretics* in the sense of those teaching pernicious and strange doctrines regarding the Faith and the Lord Jesus Christ, I believe the verb παραιτέομαι is better translated as “reject,” as we find in the King James Version. In fact, perhaps we should view it in even stronger terms, such as “eject,” or “severing all ties with.” The reason for this is that the Greek word carries an even stronger negative connotation than simply “reject,” or “refuse,” under certain contexts.

In secular Greek texts the word was used of the dissolution of marriage. Liddell and Scott in their Greek Lexicon provide examples where it was glossed as “divorce,” and “dismiss.” This is why I suggested the paraphrase of “severing all ties with.”

“παρ-αιτέομαι...4. π. γυναῖκα *divorce her*, Plu. 2.206a; π. οἰκέτην *dismiss him*, Diog.L. 6.82; π. τινὰ τῆς οἰκίας *Luc. Abdic. 1:19*”¹⁹⁸

Consider also these other usages of the Greek word found in the writings of Josephus. Josephus, of course, wrote during the same time period as

¹⁹⁸ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, Seventh Edition* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1883) pg. 1130

the apostle Paul and so the same Greek verb would still have carried all the same meanings.

In his *Antiquities of the Jews* he used the same verb (inflected as 3rd person aorist indicative) in connection with a negative context that dealt with “banishment.” The word is translated “renounced and “discarded,” in connection with banishment, as can be seen below.

“The court was at this time in such a fright and consternation, that many of the king’s most intimate friends were **banished** [from] his palace and presence, and those in the first place that were generally reputed to have merited best at his hands; as Andromachus and Gemellus were turned off among the rest. These ministers had served the king both abroad and at home, in embassies and councils; the careful education of his sons; and in places, in fine, of the greatest confidence and trust. He **renounced** (παρητήσατο) Andromachus for the kindness Alexander shewed to his son Demetrius, and then he **discarded** (παρητήσατο) Gemellus for the love he bare to Alexander.”¹⁹⁹

And in another place, Josephus uses the same word again where it is translated as “cast off,” referring to the dissolution of the marriage of Samson with his Philistine wife who betrayed him.

“He **cast off** his wife...and she, in spite, married his friend that solicited the match, which Sampson took for so unpardonable an affront, that he determined a revenge, not only upon the woman, but upon the whole nation for it.”²⁰⁰

And so, we can see that this word, in certain cases, carried a much stronger connotation, being used in cases of banishment and divorce. In other words, the word referred to the complete removal of a person from the presence of one or of many, resulting in a complete dissolution of relationship. As such, in light of all that we have said up to this point regarding the nature of the one that Titus was called to reject, it seems more than likely that Paul was referring to the excommunication of the one who would not respond to Titus’ admonitions.

Thus, if we were to translate into English this verse with all the varied meanings of the Greek word παραιτέομαι, when used in negative circumstances, it might be translated as: “**Cast off** a man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition.” Or, if we wanted to paraphrase the

¹⁹⁹ Josephus, John Court, Esq, tr., *The Works of Flavius Josephus, With the Antiquities of the Jews, from the Creation of the World* (Printed by Christopher Earl, Birmingham, 1770) pg. 556

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pg. 193

verse, we could say, “**Sever all ties** with a man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition.” Or, if one wanted to convey the ultimate result of such “casting off,” or “rejecting,” it might be paraphrased in a side note as, “*Excommunicate* a man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition.”²⁰¹ The point is that relationship that somehow existed between the two entities came to an end.

Finally, before moving on, we might mention the reason for Paul’s command to give two admonitions, followed by a third action called rejection (or excommunication). It very well could be rooted in the procedure of discipline practice by many in Israel. Paul was a Pharisee and so would have been well aware of such a practice.

Now, we do not have any evidence of this procedure in the first century (unless this is it in his epistle to Titus) but we do have evidence of it later in the Talmud. However, as the Jews were very protective of their traditions, it would not be that far-fetched to conclude this procedure in the Talmud was based upon the tradition of the Rabbis in the first century. In any case, John Lightfoot, in his classic work, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*, mentions this procedure—

As many may know, the Jews have two versions of the Talmud (which in its most general sense is simply a commentary on the *Mishnah*), the *Jerusalem Talmud* and the latter *Babylonian Talmud*. The former was compiled by Rabbis in Israel and the latter by Rabbis in Babylon. It is from the latter where he references the following regarding the fact that one guilty of certain offenses would be given two warnings, followed by a third which involved the guilty one being excommunicated under a curse. He first states—

²⁰¹ After all, the English word “excommunication” is derived from the Latin *excommunicare*, which consists of the preposition *ex*, meaning “out” or “from,” and the verb *communicare* which means, “to commune” or “to fellowship.” *Ex* is found throughout the New Testament, even in a verse like I Cor. 5:13, where it is found in the prepositional phrase *ex vobis ipsis*, translating the Greek prepositional phrase ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν, which is rendered into English as, “from among yourselves.” And the verb *communicare* in the New Testament is found in Eph. 5:11, in the phrase, *nolite communicare*, which translates the Greek phrase μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε, which is rendered into English as “having no fellowship.” Thus, the noun, *excommunication*, would simply mean to be “out of communion.” And *excommunicate*, as a verb, would mean “excluding from all communion.” So, as a paraphrase, or side note, it would be in line with Paul’s meaning.

“Being to speak of *excommunication* among the Jews, we must first speak a little concerning...*reproof*, which with the Babylonian writers was the same with excommunication...*Reproof* or *admonition* is not *less than for seven days*: as it is said, If her father spit in her face, shall she not be ashamed seven days? (Numb. xii. 12.) Rabbi Chasda saith...'*Our excommunication* (in Babylon) *is like their reproof*' (in the land of Israel).²⁰²

Thus, we should notice that the Rabbis in Babylon called all three of these actions *excommunications*, while the Rabbis in Israel would call the first and the second actions, *admonitions*, and only the third, *excommunication*. The Christian Church does not define *excommunications* in the same way as found in the Babylonian Talmud. In one sense, the Christian Church would only label the third as being *excommunication* in the truest sense.

So, with this in mind, as we read John Lightfoot's description of this process, I will include in brackets the word [admonition] following the first two excommunications within his quote. He speaks of the many reasons for excommunication, but one of them will interest us for he identifies it with one who “*is presumptuous, dissolute, a man governed by no rule,*” which he then connects with “*heretics [who] have hardened their faces.*”²⁰³ He then follows this with the procedure involved (which one will notice will be similar to Paul's command to Titus regarding heretics). He states this regarding the one to be excommunicated—

“They first struck him with simple *excommunication* [*admonition*], which they call...*niddui*, in which there was not absolute cursing...This *excommunication* [*admonition*] was for thirty days...But if the excommunicated person appeased those that excommunicated him within that time, they absolve him forthwith...But if he persisted in his perverseness, the thirty days being ended, *they excommunicate* [*admonish*] him again...*adding also a curse*. And this second *excommunication* [*admonition*] they call...*shammatha*...If he persist still for these thirty days in his perverseness...*they anathematized him.*”²⁰⁴

In other words, we see one action, the first (*niddui*), then a second action (*shammataze*), and then a third and final action in this procedure that John Lightfoot relates for us. But let's continue with his description.

²⁰² John Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon the Gospels, the Acts, some chapters of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and the first Epistle to the Corinthians* (At the University Press, Oxford, 1859) pg. 183

²⁰³ Ibid., pg. 185

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pg. 187-188

*“They excommunicate him; and after thirty days they again excommunicate (shammatzize) him; and after sixty they anathematize. Rabbenu Asher saith, ‘They anathematize...And this is much more heavy than either niddui, or shammatha. For in this is both excommunication and cursing, and the forbidding the use of any men, unless in those things only which belong to the sustaining of life. And they anathematize not but when a man hath hardened himself against the bench once and again.”*²⁰⁵

He then concludes with the Talmud’s description of the person so excommunicated.

*“This is the condition of a person excommunicate. They eat not nor drink with him, nor sit within four cubits of him, (his wife, and children, and servants being excepted, to whom it was permitted to sit by him). When they give thanks (at meat), they join him not in the thanks, nor admit him to anything which wants the ten men...”*²⁰⁶

This last sentence which says they do not “admit him to anything which wants the ten men,” means he is not admitted to synagogue, as the number ten (minyan) was the smallest number of men necessary to form a synagogue in which to meet for public worship.

Consequently, it is interesting that those in Israel could have more than likely practice a similar form of discipline like that which Paul commanded Titus. It began with a **first** admonition given. Then, after short period (30 days) if the admonition did not alter the belief or actions of the one who was warned, a **second** admonition was given. This too lasted thirty days. If after the additional thirty days the one being warned (in our case the heretic) did not repent, then the one was “**rejected**” (excommunicated). This final excommunication would be similar to that type of rejection or excommunication mentioned by both Paul and the apostle John. The apostle Paul commanded that a person so rejected was not to keep company with such a one, nor not even to eat with such a person (I Cor. 5:11). This would be similar to the Talmud’s command that they not sit near such a one, nor to eat or drink with such a one. And, the apostle John says in II John 1: 10 that one was not to “receive” such a one into a house, nor to bid him Godspeed. This would be similar to the Talmud’s command that he not be admitted to anything which wants the ten men (synagogue), neither to join him in the thanks (which in essence would require a sense of Godspeed).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 188

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pg. 189- 190

The only difference between John and Paul's procedure seems to be that the apostle Paul is concerned with not allowing the one who is to be excommunicated from remaining in the Assembly (for if he was not a part of the Church, he would not be present to be admonished or warned), whereas the apostle John seems to be concerned with not allowing an heretic to gain foothold within the Assembly. Thus Paul deals with one that is already within the Assembly, and John deals with one who is without, but seeking to be within the Assembly. But, in either case, the result is the same; the saints are not to keep company with such a person, nor to eat with such a person.

Thus, we see when we look at this verse in Titus from a literal hermeneutic, a grammatical hermeneutic, and an historical hermeneutic, it appears that Paul is dealing with heretics who denigrate the Lord Jesus Christ and who have departed the Faith and so are in need of excommunication from the Assembly.

Party Sins—Romans 16:17

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances...(NASB) ...contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (KJV)

In Titus 3:10, according to the King James Version, we saw Paul warning Titus about a “heretick,” which in many modern versions was translated as “factious” (as in the NASB), or as “divisive” (as in the NKJV). But as we discussed, it seems the King James Version was correct to translate it as heretick (heretic) as it was more than likely dealing with heresy in the modern definition of the word (i.e. doctrinal error and apostasy). However, since many today now read from different modern versions some may wonder if Paul is referring to the same class of men in Rom. 16:17, especially since in KJV the word heresy (the nominal form of the same Greek word in Titus 3:10) used in verse 19 refers to the division of verse 18 in I Cor. 11:18-19. The answer would be no for various reasons, the foremost simply being Paul is using a completely different word. The Greek word that Paul uses only occurs three times in the New Testament, here, and in I Cor. 3:3, and in Gal. 5:20, where it is variously translated as “dissensions,” “divisions” and “seditions.” It is the Greek word διχοστασία which is defined by W. E. Vine as follows—

“DICHOSTASIA (διχοστασία) lit., a standing apart (*diche*, asunder, apart, *stasis*, a standing; the root *di*—indicating division, is found in many words in various languages), is used in Romans 16:17, where believers are enjoined to mark those who cause division and to turn away from them; and in Galatians 5:20, RV (AV, seditions), where divisions are spoken of as ‘works of the flesh. Some mss. have this noun in 1 Corinthians 3:3.”²⁰⁷

If Paul was referring to the same men, then those men would have to be rejected, rather than simply “marked,” or “avoided” (as we will shortly explain).

However, in I Cor. 11:18-19 the word heresy in verse 19 refers to a different Greek word translated as division in verse 18. In other words,

²⁰⁷ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. I, pg. 329

the underlying Greek word translated as division in Rom. 16:17 is a different Greek word that is used in I Cor. 11:18. That word is σχίσμα, (pronounced schisma) where we get our English word “schism.” That word bespeaks a “tear” or “rip” within a group without there being a formal separation, or a forming of two groups. It is used in such verses as Matthew 9:16, John 7:43, and I Cor. 1:10. In all these verses there was a rent or difference of opinion without an actual separation into two groups (at least in its initial stages). This is why it was so dangerous in Titus 3:10, to ignore an “heretic,” for while in I Cor. 11:19 it referred to class distinctions and following different personalities, all which did not entail a divergence of those essential doctrines of the Faith, in Titus it did, and without the truth of the Faith, one cannot be saved.

In Corinth, those who were schismatic still held to the Faith and so the gospel could be proclaimed and souls saved. In Crete the Church was being infiltrated by false prophets and teachers that altered the truth of the Faith so that what they proclaimed led souls to be lost in the eternity of hell, rather than saved, safe and secure with Christ for eternity. That is why such men needed to be excommunicated in Crete, while in Corinth and in Rome Paul did not command such an action.

Therefore, those who were causing division in Corinth, which Paul called heresy, was not the same type of heresy referred to in Titus 3:10. Consequently, since Paul uses the same Greek word translated as division in I Cor. 3:3 as is used here in Rom. 16:17, one should not confuse the problem in Corinth as referring to the same problem in Crete. The heresy, i.e. divisions in Corinth, were of a carnal, class, economic and personality type of heresy, whereas the heresy (of the heretick) in Titus 3:10 involved a departure from the Faith. Therefore, the divisions or dissensions in Rom. 16:17 were more in line with what was happening in Corinth, than with what was happening in Crete, and so did not require excommunication.

Next, in Rom. 16:17, Paul says not only were they causing divisions or dissension, they were causing “hindrances,” or “occasions of stumbling.” W. E. Vine defines this Greek word, σκάνδαλον, that was translated as “hindrances,” as shown below—

“In NT *skandalon* is always used metaphorically, and ordinarily of anything that arouses prejudice, or becomes a hindrance to others, or causes them to fall by the way.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Ibid., vol. II, pg. 129

The word was also used in Rom. 14:13, where the KJV translates it as “an occasion to fall.”

Romans 14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or **an occasion to fall** in *his* brother's way. KJV

And in its verbal form (σκανδαλίζω) it was translated as “offend” in the KJV and as “stumble” in the NASB and NKJV in I Cor. 8:13.

I Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble. NASB

The occasions of stumbling in Corinth (at least in the first epistle) like that in Rome had to do with those Christians who were very legalistic in their practices, who tried to impose their conscience upon other Christians. They would be the same type of brethren Paul encountered (and Peter encountered before him) in Jerusalem (Acts. 11:1-2), who felt the Gentiles should live like the Jews in regard to certain laws of the Torah. But equally, it would also encompass those Christians who boasted of their liberty in Christ, who had no concern or love for their weaker brother who might stumble if they were encouraged to live like they lived.

Consequently, these men in Rome were not of the same character as the false prophets and teachers in Crete. Those in Rome were those who were divisive, causing dissension, not in regards to the Faith, but in regards to the practice of the Faith. The former in Crete required excommunication, the latter in Rome required a “marking out,” so as to be watched and observed, lest their divisiveness led to something worse.

It seems they were those who were self-centered and self-righteous in their opinions and so were those who were extreme in their zealotry, driven by their self-absorbed opinions, rather than driven by love. On one extreme it seems some were those who boasted of their liberty in Christ and so had no concern for appearances. They would eat anything, anywhere without any concern that such action might harm a fellow believer who might be weak in the faith. Paul refers to them in Rom. 14:2-3 as those who “**despise**” a fellow believer.

Romans 14:2-3 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats **despise** him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. NKJV

And W. E. Vine defines the Greek word translated as “despise,” as follows:

“...to make of no account (*ex*, out, *oudeis*, nobody, alternatively written, *outheis*), **to regard as nothing, to despise utterly**, to treat with contempt.” ²⁰⁹

How awful to actually “despise” a brother in Christ, for when one does this, one is treating a brother in the same way their Saviour and Lord was treated. The same word that Paul uses, Luke uses in Acts 4:11 which is describing how the Lord was “despised” and “set at nought” by those who wished him crucified.

Acts 4:11 This is the stone which was **set at nought** of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. KJV

The word translated as “set at nought” is the same word, so that the verse could be translated as, “This is the stone which was **despised** by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.” When Christians are so self-absorbed in their own liberty and rights that it produces “contempt” for those who do not view things the same way, are in danger of manifesting the same attitude that crucified our Lord!

The other extreme were those who were so self-righteous in themselves. The same word is also used by Luke in his Gospel describing those to whom the Lord spoke the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

Luke 18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and **despised** others: KJV

Despising others or looking down on them as not being as spiritual as yourself is actually a characteristic of one who is as self-righteous as the Pharisees. We should all guard ourselves from such an attitude!

This was the other extreme of those in Rome causing dissension and hindrances. They were spoken of in the same breath in Rom. 14:3. They were the ones who would not eat, who were so quick to judge their brethren who did eat.

Romans 14:3-10 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. ⁴ Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he

²⁰⁹ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. I, pg. 300

will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.⁵ One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.⁶ He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.⁹ For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

These brethren were on the opposite side of the fence and were ones who took pride in their obvious sanctity (i.e. in their own mind), for they would not eat with those they felt were not clean before God; also they were those who boasted that they were more being more spiritual in their Christian life for they would set apart many days for God. The problem, though, with this group, is they also were very cliquish and so, in the name of spirituality, were actually hindering the spiritual well-being of the saints. For while they boasted in their sanctity, they were, nevertheless, short on the love of Christ and also filled with the same self-righteousness exhibited by the other extreme.

It is interesting that the same introductory phrase in Greek, “Who are you” (Σὺ τίς εἶ), used by Paul in Rom. 14:4 to describe this group, is only used six times in the Bible, five times in the New Testament and once in the Greek Old Testament where Elihu asks Job the same question!

Job 35:2 What is this that thou thinkest to be according to right? **Who art thou** (Σὺ τίς εἶ) that thou hast said, I am righteous before the Lord? (Brenton's Version)

Self-righteousness will always be prefaced with this question, for one who is truly humble need not have that question raised, for they have not raised themselves up over their brethren to judge them.

Beloved, this mindset is not only manifested in regard to food or days. It is also manifested today by Christians who will always question whether other brethren are in the Spirit. They will be the ones quick to judge, quick to say, “That brother is not in Spirit.” They will be the ones who will always be looking only for that thing they can judge. They will be the ones who will always look for the bad in what their brethren have to say rather than looking for the good. Paul says in I Thess. 5:21 to

“examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good (NASB). But those on this other extreme examine everything carefully, to judge that which is bad! These are the brethren who are usually very legalistic, and controlling, who hold to Scripture, but also certain traditions established by men (who they hold in high regard) rather than simply holding to the pure tradition of God as only found in God’s Word.

These men in Rome who caused hindrances and occasions of stumbling seem to be the same men for whom Paul thanked God that they proclaimed the gospel, even though it seems they did so simply to afflict Paul.

Philippians 1:15-18 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: ¹⁶ The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: ¹⁷ But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. ¹⁸ What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. KJV

And, how would they afflict him? They would afflict him by winning souls for Christ, but then indoctrinate them in their own legalistic practices. These were the same brethren who dogged Paul wherever he went. They were like the extreme and legalistic brethren in Jerusalem who opposed Paul’s teaching (Acts 15:5). They were brethren, yes, for they still believed in Christ, but they were the ones who gloried in rabbinic discipleship which sought to raise up disciples under themselves and after themselves, which is what made them the ones on the other end of the spectrum of Christian practice that were causing such dissension and hindrances.

So to both groups in Rome, each on the opposite side of the spectrum, Paul speaks as having one thing in common—the underlying self-centeredness of their nature and the deceptive language of their words. Their words appeared good and beneficial, or, as the King James Version renders it in the next verse in Rom. 16:17-18—”good words and fair speeches.”

Romans 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. ¹⁸ For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by **good words and fair speeches** deceive the hearts of the simple.

But in reality, they were speaking words that misled the hearts of innocent Christians, who were simply looking up to their leaders to teach them the things of God's Word. The New American Standard translates that entire clause as, "by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." This is what would always upset the apostle so much that he once declared—

II Corinthians 11:29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? NASB

The New King James Version renders this last phrase in II Cor. 11:29 as, "burn with indignation." Paul would be very upset when innocent and/or young Christians would be misled by those who were not truly serving the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather their own desires for influence, recognition, and/or control in an Assembly—in an Assembly in which the Lord Jesus never authorized them to exercise such influence, as they were never appointed by the Holy Spirit to be an elder. These were the same type of Christians in Jerusalem whom Paul described as follows in his Epistle to the Galatians.

Galatians 2:4-6 But *it was* because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. ⁵ But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. ⁶ **But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)-- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.** NASB

They were Christians who puffed themselves up as spokesmen for God and for what they considered the truth, but in reality were nothing but carnal Christians seeking the accolades and respect of their fellow believers. Paul calls them "false brethren," not that they were not really brethren, but they were brethren who were false in what they taught and how they lived. For if Paul meant it the other way, i.e. that they were not really brethren, meaning true Christians, one must ask why the apostles Peter, James and John allowed them to remain in the Church in Jerusalem!

If Peter was able to discern the true character of one like a Simon Magus (Acts 8:20-23) he certainly could have discerned as to whether these men of "high reputation" in Jerusalem were really believers or not. In fact, these same men of high reputation in the Church in Jerusalem were specifically called "brethren" by both Peter and James in Acts 15: 7, 14.

Now, it should be mentioned that this form of address in and of itself would not prove they were really brethren. It is a form of address that is also used for those related simply by nationality (e.g. Acts 13:26). However, it is also used of real brethren as in the case of Acts 1:16, where it is used of all those who were to make up the very first Church in Jerusalem. Moreover, in Acts 15:4, when it says that Paul and Barnabas were received by the Church, it included these false brethren as part of the Church, being gathered together with the rest of the saints, and in Acts 15:5 it says they had believed. Because of this fact and the overall context, perhaps, the word would have better be translated within the context as “deceiving brethren.” They were brethren who were deceiving the saints with their false practices and teaching.

So while, we see that the apostles recognized them as true members of the Church, that did not stop Peter from severely rebuking them for tempting God, by their false teaching! They were true sheep in the flock of God, but were unruly sheep who, apparently, were always causing problems.

Acts 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? KJV

And is this not the way that it usually happens? Certain believers think more highly of themselves than they ought to, thinking they have the ear of God and that they are the ones who should influence the flock rather than the shepherds. As such, they lack respect for the elders, and, in some cases, do not even recognize such men as elders. And so, behind the scenes they seek to influence the saints over to their way of thinking. And because of the nature of sheep they are many times successful, gathering small cliques around themselves.

This should not surprise us, since God likens us to a flock of sheep. As related below by one who was familiar with the behavior of sheep, every flock of sheep will have other sheep that will take a lead among the other sheep. In animal husbandry these sheep are called “leaders.” Usually these will be rams, but sometimes they can even be ewes. It is very natural for sheep in the flock to follow these “leaders.” It is part of their social makeup and in many cases adds to the overall health of the flock. However, sometimes these “leaders” in the flock can be unruly, even challenging the authority of the shepherd of the flock. When this happens the other innocent sheep in the flock can be harmed. A shepherd knows this and so is always on the outlook for such unruly behavior of rams.

When such unruliness occurs, only heartache and disaster follows, as related by one familiar with such behavior of sheep in a flock:

“A SHEEP loves to live in company with its fellows, and that is why the shepherd keeps them in large flocks of a hundred or more. One sheep or wether runs in front of the flock, and all the others follow their leader [ram]. A sheep never troubles to think what is good for him, nor what he had better do or not do; but whatever the leader [ram] does the whole flock of sheep imitate, and this they find to be much the easiest plan.

Early in the morning the leader [ram] walks out of the fold to the pasture, the other sheep after him. At mid-day he lies down and rests, and the whole flock lies down round about him. In the evening he marches home again, and the others all follow. It is the wisest plan for the sheep to follow their leader [ram], for then they are sure of finding good food and shelter in bad weather. If they all keep well together they will not easily come to grief, at least as long as nothing out of the ordinary happens.

In the case of an-accident, however, the whole flock may perish by thoughtlessly doing just as their leader [ram] does. Should fire break out in the sheep fold and the leader [ram] will not move, the other sheep will not run out of the open door; **and if the shepherd** drags them by force into the open, they run back into the fire as soon as he lets go of them, there to die miserably. If the leader [ram] is startled by lightning or a storm, and in his panic jumps down a steep rock, the whole flock jumps after him and perishes. If a terrified leader [ram] runs into deep water, the others follow to drown in company. Therefore even for a sheep it is foolish always to follow another's lead without thinking for oneself. “²¹⁰

Therefore, these Christians on each side of the spectrum, those showing contempt and those judging in return, are like the unruly “leaders” of a flock. They are not shepherds, but rams. But they seek to lead like shepherds and so are happy when other sheep blindly follow them rather than following the shepherd.

But Paul warns the saints (sheep) in Rome against this, for sometimes these “leaders” or “rams” will hinder their spiritual walk, and become a stumbling block in their way, and will, ultimately, lead them to sin. Thus Paul says “to avoid” such men, such leaders or rams, if you will. In other words, the other sheep should listen to and follow the shepherds appointed among them by the Holy Spirit (and not those among them who think they should be the leaders or elders of the flock).

²¹⁰ Richard Wagner, *Stories from Natural History* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1907) pg. 7-8

What is interesting is when Paul says to “avoid” them in Rom. 16:17, he uses the Greek word ἐκκλίνω, which is a combination of ἐκ – from, and κλίνω – bend. It means to lean away from them. Some translations render that word as *turn away*, but that is not the real idea (The idea of “turning away” is found in II Tim. 3:5 and is a different Greek word as we will see.)

The King James Version translation of ἐκκλίνω as “*avoid*,” provides the reader a better understanding of the word. The idea is that when such men reach out to grab you, seeking to pull you toward their way, when that happens, then bend away from them, lean back. It means to be reticent toward anything they say or do, to keep aloof from them. What is interesting is the entire clause contains the prepositional phrase, ἀπ’ αὐτῶν, which can carry the idea of keeping a distance from, or separating “from” The very same phrase is used of our Lord withdrawing from his disciples when he was with them in the garden.

Luke 22:41 And he was withdrawn from them (ἀπ’ αὐτῶν) about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed. KJV

Our Lord was separated from them not because of any evil within his disciples (although they were of a mindset to not let him go through with his decision to allow himself to be captured and crucified) but rather for the purposes of praying to his Father and affirming once more that He was willing to do the Father’s will and to not let anything deter him from that path.

In one sense, this is Paul’s admonition to the saints in Rome. It is as if he is saying, “Know which men among you wish you to follow them and not the shepherds of the flock. Mark them and lean away from them. They wish to separate you from following the shepherd, but rather you separate from them, keeping your distance from them. When they wish you to go in a direction other than the direction the shepherds wish you to go, hold back from following them and rather follow the direction of the shepherds.

It almost gives the idea of “giving a cold shoulder” to someone, “to act reserved towards someone.” But notice it does not carry an idea of removal. Paul does not say to reject them as he did those in Titus 3:10. He does not say to remove them as he did to the one in I Cor. 5:13. Why?—because they were not heretics, but were brethren whose ways were carnal and misleading, a departure from the ways of the cross.

In fact, this admonition seems to be directed more to the sheep of the flock in which these rams are located and not so much to the shepherds of that flock. The sheep are told to avoid the rams, but the shepherds are called to discipline, and, indeed, love the rams, for they too are part of the flock to which the Holy Spirit made them overseers and pastors. The rams needed the shepherding love of the shepherds which sometimes calls for the rod and not the staff. Those with such spiritual authority in a flock, whether a shepherd or a one gifted in the work, are called to rebuke with all authority.

Titus 2:15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. KJV

And, from what I have read of real sheep and rams, most rams who try to challenge the shepherd will back down when the shepherd acts in this way, especially when those rams have been in the flock since the time they were young. But, I have also read sometimes that such rams who wish to be unruly will not submit, especially, if they were introduced as adult rams into the flock, not being with the shepherd from a young age. Obviously, if such unruliness continues, finally leading up to such a one continually reviling the shepherd or shepherds, then that person would fall under the purview of I Cor. 5:11-13 and that person would have to be removed or excommunicated.

Make no mistake, such men as referenced in Rom. 16:17-18 are a real danger to the flock and so require a watchful eye over what they do, for if left alone they could hurt many other sheep in the flock. I have seen this happen, being an elder myself in a flock. One person comes in and challenges the elders, thinking they know better, and that they are the ones who are truly pleasing to the Lord, and so they stir up controversy and rob the flock of its peace. One time, I am afraid, I may not have acted quickly enough with such ones, as I was trying to be patient in the situation, and, unfortunately, some saints were hurt and mislead. But in the end the Lord in His mercy as the Chief Shepherd healed hearts and protected His flock as a whole. Some rams are difficult to shepherd, but a shepherd has great love for them too, for they are part of his flock. No shepherd wishes to reject such unruly rams, but wishes to help them to grow in the Lord; but sometimes they “will not” and the shepherd has no choice but to protect the rest of the flock, and so move to have such ones removed from the Assembly once their unruliness leads to more than just hindrances and divisiveness, but to actual reviling and division of one who is rapacious like a wolf who separates the weak from the rest (as per

I Cor. 5). Then excommunication must take place, but that is the result of I Cor. 5, not Rom. 16:17-18, and hopefully, is something that will never have to take place.

This is the difference between Rom. 16:17-18 and Titus 3:10 and II John 1:9-11. Those in Rom. 16:17-18 are still sound in the Faith, not reaching the point of heresy as seen in Titus 3:10 and/or II John 1:9-11. Unfortunately, those who fall into that category many times end up in heresy, for they become so puffed up in themselves by their self-righteousness and carnality that they lose all discernment, thinking they are teaching truth. But until that time comes, the apostle Paul does not say to remove such a one, or to not eat with such a one, or to reject such a one, but simply to “mark” such a one and to “lean away” from such a one, praying that they will see the errors of their way, and turn themselves away from their divisiveness and their hindrances to others in the flock.

Self-serving Sins—I Timothy 6:1-5

I Timothy 6:1-5 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, **that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.**² And they that have believing masters, let them not despise *them*, because they are brethren; but rather do *them* service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.³ If any man teach otherwise, **and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ,** and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;⁴ He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,⁵ Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, **supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.**⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain.⁷ For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.⁸ And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.⁹ **But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.**¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.¹¹ **But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.** KJV

Conybeare and Howson translate that last part of verse 4 as “gainful trade,” the significance of which we shall discuss later.

I Timothy 6: 3-4 If any man teach falsely, and consent not to the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the godly doctrine, he is blinded with pride, and understands nothing, but is filled with a sickly appetite for disputations and contentions about words, whence arise envy, strife, reproaches, evil suspicions, violent collisions, of men whose mind is corrupted, and who are destitute of the truth; who think that godliness is a gainful trade.²¹¹

This passage of Scripture is an example of the danger of those Christians, referred to in Rom. 16:17-18, continuing in their carnal ways, devoid of all spiritual discernment and understanding in regard to the way of the cross. The contextual emphasis of this passage is that the name of God and His doctrine not be blasphemed. In other words, Christians should mirror the true character of God in our dealings with the unsaved. In this light, Paul talks of those who were not reflecting the true nature of God as found in Christ.

²¹¹ W. J. Conybeare, J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Vol. II* (Charles Scribner, New York, 1860) pg. 458

Christ was humble, but these teachers were proud and puffed up in their ignorance, “doting” about things that do not edify. The Greek word translate “doting” means “sick,” or “diseased,” so that it is not being used in a positive sense to convey the innocent and harmless doting, for example, of a grandmother that lovingly dotes about her grandchildren. Rather it is being used in its negative usage, wherein one has an overbearing focus on something or someone to the point of it creating an inordinate and unhealthy situation. In this case, those who were puffed up had an inordinate love for argument and disputations that lead to further error, whereas one who conformed himself to the words of the Lord Jesus and the doctrine conforming to godliness, would realize that the purpose of one’s teaching was—love, a pure heart, good conscience and a sincere faith.

1 Timothy 1:5-7 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶ For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, ⁷ wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. NASB

But these teachers, being carnal and sick, were focused on things that engendered the opposite. The phrase translated “whereof cometh” could be translated “out of which are born.” So that from their sickness are born envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, and the perverse disputings of men who are so corrupted in their understandings that they even think that making money off the gospel is a perfectly acceptable occupation for a teacher. This in itself shows how they were not consenting to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ. For where are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ found? They are primarily found in the Gospels and in the book of Acts, and the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels said this regarding ministry, “freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8). And in the Book of Acts, Paul relates these wholesome words of Jesus—“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts. 20:35). And, yet these teachers ignored those words of Jesus and instead taught one should make gainful trade of one’s teaching as shown in the translation of Conybeare and Howson above.

Contrast the difference between one who respects and consents to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ and one who does not. Paul prefaces this quote of the Lord Jesus Christ in Acts 20:35 with the following statement—

Acts 20:33-35 “I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” NASB

These men in Ephesus, though, did the opposite; they coveted the silver and gold of their hearers, thinking they could make gain and profit off the things of God. And what is so ironic about it all is these same men, who were seeking riches, were losing out on true riches—truth.

As such, Paul tells Timothy to withdraw from them. The Geneva Bible that preceded the King James Bible renders it, *from such separate thy self*. In other words, Paul is telling Timothy to stand apart from them. The Greek word is ἀφίστημι, and is made up of the preposition ἀπό (from) and the verb ἵστημι (to stand). In essence, Paul is telling Timothy to be separate from them in every way, to take a stand against their teaching, their perverse disputing, and their endless arguments, and their focus on enriching themselves through what they teach. Paul contextually connects them with those in verse 9 who wish to get rich. These are the same type of teachers that Paul disparages in II Cor. 2:17. The New American Standard Bible brings out the full import of what Paul meant in this verse.

II Corinthians 2:17 For we are not like many, **peddling the word of God**, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. NASB

Paul is referring to men who by their practice of charging or seeking money for their preaching and teaching were actually peddling the Word of God, turning the ministry into a place of business and profit making. They followed this practice so as to sustain their ministry and to provide for themselves a living apart from having to work with their own hands. How unfortunate that this same mindset against which Paul stood, is also prevalent in today's Churches. More and more Churches today are using modern marketing techniques to raise money for their Churches and ministries. Christian websites are filled with things for sale, rather than being in accordance with the “wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ,” which said, “Freely you have received, freely give.” Recordings of teaching or preaching are actually sold for profit. In other words, they are charging God's people for teaching. This is not unlike what these men were doing in Ephesus. And why is this so common today. Because teachers are not willing to work with their own hands, as Paul relates in

Acts 20:34 so that the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ might be followed when he said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Why is this so prevalent?—because many Christian leaders no longer walk by faith. They walk by sight. They too, in some cases, are turning godliness into monetary gain; it matters not if it is used for the work. The end does not justify the means.

Where did such a mindset come arise? This mindset of using God’s Word to make profit did not arise from any acceptable Jewish practice, for they were taught that ministry was sacred and that one should never turn the Torah into a spade to dig with. This common rabbinic belief is illustrated in this saying of Rabbi Zadok quoted below.

The Rabbis belonged to the majority, being mostly recruited, as already pointed out in another place, from the artisan, trading, and labouring classes. This very R. Zadok, whom I have just mentioned, says: “Make not the Torah a crown wherewith to aggrandise thyself, nor a spade wherewith to dig.”²¹²

This was the common mindset of the Pharisees, which, of course, Paul states he was before he was saved, calling himself a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). In fact, this mindset would have been passed on to Paul by Gamaliel (under whom Paul studied— Acts 22:3), and Gamaliel, in turn, would have received it from his grandfather Rabbi Hillel (c.110 BC-10AD). Rabbi Hillel was purported to have lived to age 120 and so was still alive to a few years after our Lord Jesus was born. It was he whose saying was recorded in the Mishnah. It said,

“...he that makes profit out of the words of the Law removes his life from the world.”²¹³

So it is very unlikely that this belief that godliness, being a means of gain, ever came from Christians in Ephesus who were of a Jewish background. More than likely, it came from those of a Gentile background, for it was a common tradition among the Gentile world of that day that teachers from different religions and/or philosophies would travel about the Roman Empire, making money off their teaching. In fact, one of the major philosophical schools that educated such teachers was founded right there in Ephesus, where Timothy was working.

²¹² Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (Macmillan, New York, 1909) pg. 154

²¹³ Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992) pg. 453

Such teachers had no scruples in making money from their teaching. In the Gentile world, it was an acceptable profession in which to be engaged, and from which many would become wealthy. One such teacher was the famous philosopher by the name of Lucian (c. 125-180 A.D.) who was born not many years after the death of the apostle John. The following is related about his life.

“In Lucian’s day the open sesame to a professional career was public speaking; once a man had the rhetorician’s arsenal at his command the way was open to riches and reputation as lawyer or lecturer. There were first-rate universities providing such training in Ionia at Ephesus and Smyrna...The traveling lecturer of those days could make money and a name by entertaining the well-fed, culturally minded burghers of the prosperous cities that dotted the Roman Empire. [As such] Lucian left Ionia and spent a number of highly successful years lecturing in Greece, Italy, and Gaul...About 160 or so he returned to Ionia...a wealthy man...”²¹⁴

Nevertheless, even though the practice was considered honourable in the pagan world, that did not mean the men were honourable. In fact, this same Lucian in one of his writings relates how Christians were so easily taken advantage of by unscrupulous men, calling them “simple souls.”

“You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. Now an adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who has seen the world, has only to get among these simple souls, and his fortune is pretty soon made; he plays with them.”²¹⁵

And so, I believe it was these types of unscrupulous men that were causing problems for the Christians in Ephesus. And I do not think we should limit it to only those teachers in that local Church, nor, necessarily, the Church at all. Paul prefaces these verses with, “If any man teach otherwise.” Such teachers as those in Ephesus were found

²¹⁴ Lionel Casson, ed. & tr., *Selected Satires of Lucian* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1968) pg. xiii-xiv

²¹⁵ Lucian of Samosata, H. W. Fowler, F. G. Fowler, tr., *The Works of Lucian of Samosata: Complete with Exceptions Specified in the Preface, Vol. 4* (At the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1905) pg. 83

everywhere in the first century, men who are devoid of truth and/or are reprobate in regard to faith.

As an aside, let me mention a real danger that comes from men or teachers not much different from these men in Ephesus (minus, of course, making money off the Christian faith). How many times will our young people go off to college and be misled by ungodly professors who are like these teachers in Ephesus. Many young Christians have their faith shipwrecked by such professors. Such professors today mock the words of the Lord Jesus, for the purpose of intimidating young hearts. They teach with a condescending air about them, looking down on anyone who disagrees. They ridicule the Christian faith of our young people, and in some cases, destroy their faith. They purport to know all, but, in reality, they know nothing. They “dote,” or are obsessed, with anything they think will contradict the Bible (i.e. in their corrupted minds). And all that their teaching does is create men and women with minds corrupted like their own, corrupted by professors who are destitute of truth and have a fondness for perverse disputing. Oh, how we should warn and prepare our young people before going to college to, to be strong in the Lord, standing against these teachers in the same way Paul commands Timothy to do so. Or, if they are not yet strong enough in their walk with the Lord, counsel them to wait, or, perhaps attend a year of Bible school first. But with this aside completed, let us return to our text.

The question must be asked as to how these teachers gained a foothold in the Church. Perhaps what was occurring was that certain believers from the Assembly, perhaps, new converts, were still in the habit of frequenting these lecture halls of these particular teachers in Ephesus, just like the ones mentioned in the writings of Lucian. Perhaps they enjoyed philosophical debate and so were enamored by these teachers who were trained in oratorical skills and so waxed so eloquent in their teaching that they continued to frequent these lectures halls, taking along other believers with them. In other words, perhaps, part of the problem was that certain of these philosophical teachers were mixing their thoughts with Christian thought, thereby creating a new way to follow Christ (which in reality would not be the real Christ, but a Christ of their own imagination and philosophy). Maybe these teachers would even come to the Church in Ephesus. In either case, Paul knew they were wreaking havoc to the spiritual well-being of the saints.

The same problem exists today when Christians are inundated by all kinds of false teaching and false wisdom from without the local Church. Christians are exposed to this from the internet, social media, and even from certain ones on television who preach a gospel of prosperity, who milk unsuspecting Christians of their money and their spiritual well-being.

Then there are others do not embrace the gospel of prosperity but, nevertheless spend hours begging the saints for money. In either case they both are not following the *wholesome words* of the Lord Jesus who said “freely you have received, freely give,” nor the words of the Holy Spirit who through Paul who said, “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:34-35 NASB). Rather, like so many, they have turned godliness into a *gainful trade*.

As an example how such a mindset has now become acceptable, look at many Christian websites today and you are likely to find a tab called STORE. Does this not speak volumes about what is now considered acceptable? Do we really think that if such things were available in Paul’s time, that he would put up a website with a tab labeled STORE, wherein he would sell his messages to Churches, or make copies on parchment of his messages, like the one he gave in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-47) and then sell it for a price? Do we think he would really say to himself, “Why spend all this time laboring with my hands to support myself and my co-workers when all I have to do is to sell merchandise for a profit online? I could fund my entire campaign in Spain if I do this!” Would he not rather, beloved, follow the wholesome words of his Master to freely give what he had freely received? Would he not also have a holy aversion to turning something as sacred as ministry into a business to earn profit?” Was it not the *wholesome words of the Lord Jesus*, recorded for us in the Bible by the Holy Spirit which also said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house **a place of business**” (John 2:16—NASB)?

I know this might seem to be a silly example, but is that not exactly what is happening now to many Christian ministries and/or Churches? Rather than consenting to those wholesome words of the Lord Jesus, they now have their merchandise ready to sell, from books, to their teachings on

CD's made available for a price, to other Christian items as well, doing exactly what Paul warned against in the passage before us as well in II Cor. 2:17—the peddling of the Word of God. Can one really imagine Paul the apostle doing such a thing, offering his writings and messages for sale wherever he travelled in the Roman Empire? We know he wrote other epistles that were not a part of Scripture. Can you imagine him deciding to make copies of those other epistles and then sell them for profit to Christians?

Now, it must be admitted, if anyone deserved to have his time free so as to minister to the saints, it would have been the apostle Paul. But did the Lord Jesus have Paul do that? That is, assuming Paul lived his life in obedience to Christ, walking in the Spirit, which I am sure most would admit he did. So, if Paul's life is an example of the will of the Lord Jesus for His servants (I Cor. 11:1), what did Paul do when he was in need? The answer is, rather than seeking to make money by selling spiritual things, Scripture says he worked with his hands night and day!

II Thessalonians 3:8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: KJV

Think of it. Paul worked night and day. Yet, many ministers today are not even willing to labour with their hands for even half of that time so as to serve the Lord as Paul directs in Acts 20:30. Instead they think it is necessary to earn profit off the things of the Lord so as to support their ministry and themselves. Why?

No doubt, some might say that by doing so they have more time to devote to the Lord. But beloved, it is not the amount of service that is done, but the type of service that is done. A little ministry done freely in the power of the Spirit will be the gold, silver and precious stones that will have lasting effects unto eternity. Much ministry, not done freely, in contradiction to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus, will be the wood, hay and stubble that will not have lasting effects (unless God decides otherwise in His mercy). But they rationalize away the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus to freely give, by thinking they will have more time for ministry. Of course, their motives are good. They do it for the Lord, but why not consent to the words of the Lord Jesus and give it away freely?

It might even make more sense, if they still felt to do it that way, to at least sell things at cost and trust the Lord for their needs, but many times those things are marked up for profit like any retailer would do for his business. (And sometimes I have seen things marked up even more than an unsaved retailer would do!) Now I know, beloved, that a publisher who prints the messages and buys the paper and distributes the books must make a profit to provide that service, but the minister of the Gospel is not the publisher and does not need to make that profit to serve the Lord. Rather, if we wished to sell things, he could sell it at the exact cost of the item and make no profit off the things of the Lord, and then trust the Lord for the rest, or work with their hands as did Paul! Granted that still would not be giving it away freely, but it least it would be more in line with the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus who said to not turn the Father's house into a place of business (John 2:16)!

The point is that we are told in Scripture to work with our hands if funds are low—not to sell the things of the Lord. Now if free will gifts were given to Paul, he would freely receive it. Do not misunderstand us. We are not saying that is contrary to the words of the Lord to accept offerings. To receive free will gifts are also part of the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus when He said, “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (I Cor. 9:14 NKJV).

But what we are saying is that if someone asks for gifts or money for their livelihood, even if that livelihood is spent serving the Lord, is contrary to the words of the Lord, for our Lord never asked for support, nor did Paul; and the one or two times Paul does speak of it, he makes clear he is not speaking of it because he wants the saints to give to support him or his work. In the very next verse after I Cor. 9:14 above, Paul says,

I Corinthians 9:15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. NASB

And in Philippians 4:17 he says,

Philippians 4:17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. NKJV

In this verse, the Greek word that is translated “seek” is an intensified form of the verb. The word Paul chose is very instructive. It bespeaks a strong desire. J. H. Bass provides the following in his Greek Lexicon—

“Επιζητέω, ὤ, (ἐπὶ and ζητέω) 1. to seek **earnestly or continually**; 2. to **beg or demand earnestly**; 3. to desire...”²¹⁶

So, in other words, Paul is bending over backwards to make clear he is “not” secretly seeking that money would be given to him, by bringing up the subject to his readers. He wants them to know he would never “beg,” or “earnestly desire” that money would ever be given to him, either directly or “indirectly!” That simply was not his way. If in need and a gift came, he would give thanks. But he would never seek a gift from anyone for himself or his work. Rather, he would work with his hands.

A. T. Robertson, in commenting on this Greek verb and what the Greek word conveyed, says this, including a quote by the famous Greek scholar, J. B. Lightfoot—“Lightfoot called it ‘the Apostle’s nervous anxiety to clear himself; of wanting more gifts.’”²¹⁷ Paul wanted to be so careful that his work or ministry should never be tainted with begging for money. Why? Because he was not like some who peddled the Word of God. Paul so graciously and freely received salvation from the Lord all those years before on the Damascus Road that he always wanted to emulate His Master and so freely give himself!

Why is this so important? The reason is because our views about money and ministry (according to this portion of Scripture) might engender terrible things in our lives, and ultimately in the lives of others. These teachers that Paul was warning Timothy against were perfectly content to turn serving the Lord into a gainful trade to earn money. William MacDonald provides a helpful comment in this regard.

“These men suppose that godliness is a means of gain. Apparently, they choose to be religious teachers as a profession in which they are well paid for a minimum of work. ‘They make the holiest of vocations a money-gaining craft...[and it] only reminds us of the hireling shepherds who pose as Christian ministers but have no real love for the truth, **but it also makes us think of the commercialism which has become so common in Christendom**—the sale of

²¹⁶ J. H. Bass, *A Greek and English Manual Lexicon to the New Testament* (Baldwin & Cradock, London, 1829) pg. 86

²¹⁷ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. IV* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1931) pg. 462

indulgences, games of lottery, bazaars and sales, etc. From such withdraw yourself.' We are commanded to steer clear of such ungodly professors."²¹⁸

Consequently, since such things have always been a danger to the well-being of the saints, a godly elder or a worker must always be watchful in regard to those things that can influence the saints from without. As a pastor or a worker, such a one must “stand apart” and “stand against” such men and the things they teach, and against all things that threaten the flock, especially those immature Christians, carnal Christians or soulical Christians in the flock that are more susceptible to such teachings and philosophies. In fact, we would all be well to remember Paul’s admonition to us in Col. 2:8-10—

Colossians 2:8-10 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.⁹ For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form,¹⁰ and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority. NASB

And so, because of all this and the spiritual danger posed to the saints by teachers who would not consent to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus and the doctrine pertaining to godliness, Paul tells Timothy to stand against them, as we mentioned already. As we said earlier, the Greek word is made up of the preposition ἀπό (from) and the verb ἵστημι (to stand), so that Paul is telling Timothy to be separate from them in every way, to take a stand against their teaching, and their focus on enriching themselves through what they teach.

Paul knows that anyone who could ignore, oppose, contradict, or reinterpret the words of the Lord Jesus Christ could not be trusted and should never be allowed to continue teaching unopposed in the Assembly, or, to have any influence within the Assembly. Why?—because their conduct, mindset and teaching would only lead to more error and, eventually, more than likely, to heresy (if such was not already the case).

Because of this, one must assume that Paul’s command to Timothy to “stand from” them or to “withdraw from” them would have been the first step in what would eventually have to unfold if they did not change their

²¹⁸ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995) pg. 2099-2100

ways and repent—that being their ultimate excommunication from the Church.

Thus, we see that those teachers mentioned in I Tim. 1:3 must have been these teachers mentioned in I Tim. 6: 3-5.

“As I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus, when I was going into Macedonia, **that thou mightest charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine...If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,** ⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,⁵ useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. **From such withdraw yourself.** “(I Timothy 1:3 ASV; I Timothy 6:3-5 NKJV)

Therefore, when we compare Scripture with Scripture (cf. Titus 3:10), it seems the “charge” in I Tim. 1:3 must have been the equivalent of the first “admonition” mentioned in Titus 3:10, in which case, the command to “stand against,” or to “stand from” these teachers would be part of the charge or first admonition given to one in danger of being excommunicated.

In other words, Timothy would make known to these teachers the error of their doctrine by standing against them, and from them, by teaching and preaching the true doctrine conforming to godliness, which was made known by Paul and, of course, by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is found in I Tim. 6:2, where Paul said “teach and preach these *principles*” (NASB). Therefore, we see that an admonition, as was mentioned in Titus 3:10, must have first encompassed the presentation of the correct or true doctrine, along with a warning or charge to not teach anything contrary to it.

Consequently, it seems what we have in Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy is a revelation of the process behind Paul’s instruction to Titus to reject a heretic after the first and second warning. This means that if these teachers in Ephesus ignored Timothy’s charge to not teach any other doctrine in the Assembly, they would be given a second charge or admonition after a certain length of time (perhaps thirty days as we already mention), which if they ignored again, would then result in their rejection and removal from the Assembly.

Beloved, this shows us the danger of those Christians mentioned by Paul in Rom. 16: 17-18 continuing on in their self-righteousness ways, always causing divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine taught by the apostles. Carnality will always lead to more carnality. It is almost as if one can see in First Timothy the fruit of such divisive ways practiced by those in Rome.

Christians like those mentioned in Rom. 16:17-18, who do not repent, will spiral further and further away from the truth, eventually becoming corrupt in their mind because they refuse to listen to and to serve the Lord Jesus. Instead, they will serve their own soul's appetites. In other words, over the course of time such men, who begin to manifest those characteristics mentioned in Rom. 16:17-18, will eventually manifest the characteristics of those mentioned in I Tim. 6:1-5, if they refuse to repent of their ways. But it will not end there, as we will now see, for if such ones like those mentioned in I Tim. 6:1-5 do not repent of their false ways, they will end up with nothing but an empty form of godliness, devoid of all power (and truth) and manifest the characteristics of those mentioned in II Tim. 3:1-8, which means they will have to be rejected as those were rejected in Titus 3:10.

Apostasy—II Timothy 3:1-8

II Timothy 3:1-8 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ²For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, ⁴ Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; ⁵ Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. ⁶ For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ⁷ Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. KJV

Apparently, the teachers mentioned in Ephesus who were proud, divisive, corrupt, and lacking truth, never accepted Timothy's charge or admonition to stop teaching doctrines contrary to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus and the doctrine conforming to godliness. Because of their false ways and doctrines they became more and more like those in the world. In other words, those carnal teachers were more and more walking like *mere* men, i.e. like natural or soulical men (see I Cor. 3:3—wherein the *mere* men of I Cor. 3:3 refer to the "soulical" men of I Cor. 2:14). They were men who would not deny self, but rather they would love self. And they were still covetous, turning godliness into a gainful trade. They were still proud as Paul said in I Tim. 6:4 and they were still thinking they knew something, but in reality knew nothing, or, as Paul now says in this epistle, "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. And, finally, they were still corrupt in their minds, and destitute of the truth. However in regard to that truth, we now find them not only destitute of the truth, we now find them openly resisting the truth, just as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, using their form of godliness to deceive others and openly oppose the ones who truly do manifest true godliness.

This phrase "having a form of godliness" could be translated in many different ways as the participle "having" (ἔχοντες) can be understood in many different ways, depending on the overall context. For instance, I mentioned in the sentence above that these men were "using" godliness. This same participle actually carried this sense in I Peter 2:16 as translated by the King James Version translators.

I Peter 2:16 As free, and not **using** (ἔχοντες) *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. KJV

If one adopted this nuance one could translate this phrase as, “**using** a form of godliness, but denying its power.”

And then there are other contextual understandings of this verb. The New American Standard Bible translates the participle as “keep” in I Pet. 3:16

I Peter 3:16 and **keep** (ἔχοντες) a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. NASB

With this sense, Paul’s phrase could be translated as, “**keeping** a form of godliness, but denying its power.”

And then we have the New American Standard Bible’s actual translation of this verse as—

II Timothy 3:5 “**holding** (ἔχοντες) to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power,,,” NASB

In one translation this participle is even translated as “cling,” in which case, if we translated it with that nuance, the phrase would be understood as, “**clinging** to a form of godliness, but denying its power.”

To be honest, all these translations are perfectly acceptable for in all of them the basic idea of the verb is conveyed wherein something is being associated with someone, whether by possession, control, or use. Only context can fine tune that understanding, and that fine tuning is important, for “having” a form of godliness is slightly different than “holding” to a form of godliness, or, indeed, “using” a form of godliness, as we will shortly see.

If I was to choose which understandings seem to fit the immediate and the overall context, I would have to go with the New American Standard Bible’s understanding of “holding (ἔχοντες) to a form of godliness,” perhaps, with the further thought of “clinging to a form of godliness,” or, indeed, “using a form of godliness.” These seems to fit in better with the overall context, rather than the understanding of “having”, especially when we combine it with the teachers Timothy dealt with in Ephesus as related in Paul’s first epistle to him. But we will discuss this in more detail shortly.

These teachers did not repent; they did not stop teaching those doctrines in opposition to the wholesome words of Jesus and the doctrine

conforming to godliness. Rather they continued on down their dangerous path, ignoring Timothy, ignoring Paul, ignoring the words of the Lord Jesus, because they served another master—their own bellies, using the term Paul uses for those carnal teachers in Rome (cf. Rom. 16:18). So if those Christian teachers in Rome, who were only beginning their divisive ways, were serving their own bellies, how much more would these teachers in Ephesus be doing the same thing?

As we said before, there seems to be a downward progression of such teachers as mentioned by Paul. Those teachers in Rom. 16:17-18 led to the type of teacher in I Tim. 1:3; 6:1-5 which led to these teachers in II Tim. 3:5. Carnality will always beget more carnality, not only in the one who is teaching, but also in the ears of the one who is hearing!

II Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. NKJV

Near the end of the apostle Paul's life these false teachers were multiplying throughout the Churches. And many of them were Christians who had fallen away, first unto carnality and divisiveness, then unto man-made traditions consisting of myths and fables, then unto greed, and now in the Second Epistle to Timothy, into something even worse—apostasy!

As such, the question naturally arises as to whether they are really Christians or not. Some may believe that since Paul begins II Tim. 3:2 with the word “men” (men shall be lovers of self) and not Christian (Christians shall be lovers of self) that these men in II Tim. 3:1-8 must be unbelievers. This may be, but not necessarily so. The word “men” (ἄνθρωπος) is used five times by Paul in his Second Timothy. The first time and the last time, in the epistle, it is used for a Christian (II Tim. 2:2 & 3:17). One time it is used of an unbeliever (II Tim. 3:13). And two other times it is used where it could refer to an unbeliever or it could refer to a believer (II Tim. 3:2, 8). So, the use of the word “men,” in and of itself, does not necessarily tell us to whom Paul is referring. At the minimum, one must say that it does not clearly refer to a Christian, but equally so it does not, necessarily, rule out a Christian.

Now some may object and say that the characteristics given by Paul in verse 2-4 could never refer to a Christian. I have to admit that some of the characteristics mentioned are closer to a description of an unbeliever

and not a believer. And, indeed, some are quite condemning for a Christian to ever manifest. But what many forget is that whatever an unbeliever can do a believer can do (i.e. minus a continual life of sin without any chastisement from the Lord—Heb. 12:6-8), especially once apostasy takes hold. Some of these characteristics are quite bad, but let me ask you, “What is called one of the worst, if not the worst sin or evil of all?” The answer is pride.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. KJV

Proverbs 6:16-19 These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: ¹⁷ **A proud look**, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹ A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. KJV

And so, if one believes these characteristics of men in the last days refers to unbelievers, and pride is one of the evils listed by Paul, does that mean a believer cannot also be proud? Of course, not. In fact, Peter warns Christians against being proud in I Pet. 5:5-6, using the very same Greek word (ὑπερήφανος) that Paul uses in II Tim. 3:2. And Paul even uses the very same Greek word in its verbal form for being proud of himself in II Cor. 12:7 (ὑπεραίρω) that he also uses (in its participial form) to speak of the antichrist’s proud exaltation of himself in II Thess. 2:4! So Paul, apparently, believed it was possible that a Christian might succumb to this evil sin, wherein it would then become a characteristic of his life.

So if Paul intimates that he could be in danger of manifesting pride in his life, why would one presume the others evils could not also be manifested by a Christian? Most assuredly, unbelievers are lovers of money, but also, most assuredly, believers are capable of such love (I Tim. 6:10). And, most assuredly, unbelievers can also be disobedient to parents, but also, most assuredly, believers can be disobedient. And, if we consider the seventh thing the LORD hates, i.e. he that soweth discord among the brethren, oh how we have witnessed that evil being manifested by Christians, manifesting with it the evil of being “unloving” and “unforgiving” that Paul mentions in this list!

So, even if we consider the middle two uses of “men” by the apostle in his epistle to refer to unbelievers we must admit that it can also refer to believers who are acting like the men of this world. This is why Scripture

tells us that Christians are not to love the world, or the things in the world.

And this brings us to whether “having a form of godliness” is the correct rendering, or if “holding to a form of godliness” is the correct rendering, or if the thoughts behind both renderings are intended. We will look at this from two perspectives—first, from the perspective that the form of godliness refers to the expression of those inward graces of Christianity, and, second that the form of godliness refers to the written Word of God, or, perhaps, the pattern of sound words, i.e. the Faith. We will first consider the first perspective that godliness refers to the inward possession of grace.

1) First Perspective—The form of godliness refers to the inward graces of Christianity possessed within

If one believes the form of godliness refers to the possession of the inward grace of piety toward God, and one prefers the translation of “having a form of godliness,” than it seems these teachers must have been true believers who had fallen away. The reason is because the Greek word translated “form” (μόρφωσιν) in II Tim. 3:5 must bespeak an outward appearance of an inward reality, for the reasons we will now state.

Although, it is a different Greek word than that which is used in Phil. 2:6-8 for “form” (i.e. μορφή), it is a cognate word with the same underlying thought, and so I feel it still must correspond to that of which it is an outward form. I do not feel it can carry the meaning of an inaccurate representation of the thing of which it is an expression. The problem is we do not have many uses of this word in the Bible. It is only used in one other place in the Bible and that is in Rom. 2:20 where in the Greek it reads, “ἔχοντα τὴν **μόρφωσιν** τῆς γνώσεως καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐν τῷ νόμῳ,” and is rendered by the NASB as, “having in the Law the **embodiment** of knowledge and of the truth.” And in the NKJV it is rendered as, “having the **form** of knowledge and truth in the law.” Obviously, in this verse Paul is not saying that the “form” of knowledge and truth in the Law is somehow false, or an inaccurate expression. Paul is saying the form, which is the Law, is an accurate expression of knowledge and truth. Because of this meaning of the Greek word being so clearly demonstrated in Rom. 2:20, it seems it must be understood the same way in II Tim. 3:5, which would mean the form of godliness would

mean an accurate expression of reality and not an inaccurate expression, or a mere semblance of reality,.

I know some Lexicons state otherwise, and that this word carries the idea of a “semblance, or facade” but I am afraid that is a theological interpretation of the word, or, it is because they believe such a meaning is inferred by Paul’s next phrase that they have denied the power of godliness. But I do not think so. It seems that Paul is using “form” in a positive sense and “godliness” in a positive sense. He is not saying the form is defective, nor is he inferring that the godliness is defective or not real, or that it refers to the piety or godliness of another religion in general. For if Paul was referring to a godliness in any religion, so that he is saying these teachers have a form of a religion, a religion that is false, the next phrase does not make sense, for why would they then reject its power? Rather if they had a form of religion that they created by their false doctrines, they would be proclaiming its power, not denying it.

So it seems Paul is using “form” and “godliness” in its true and positive sense. He is using it with the sense that it is an accurate outward expression of a genuine inward godliness, in the same way he used the same word in Rom. 2:20 to indicate a true and outward expression of the knowledge and truth in the Law.

Thus, unless one can demonstrate that the word *μόρφωσις* (form) can be used with a negative and inaccurate sense of what it expresses, and if one still prefers the KJV translation, “having a form of godliness,” it seems it must mean that the person does, indeed, possess the godliness within, which would mean he is a believer who has fallen away by refusing to walk by its power.

This is a possibility, for the indications in both Romans 16:17-18 and in I Tim. 6:1-5 point to genuine Christians who have lost their way. One cannot fall away from the faith if one did not already have the true faith. Moreover, if those teachers in Rom. 16:17-18 were clearly unbelievers in his mind, Paul would have said they needed to be excommunicated or rejected, not simply marked and kept at a distance, which he did not.

So this would be a possibility. They are true Christians who have fallen away from the Faith and so must be held accountable for their apostasy, as we will shortly see. They would be like Hymenaeus and Alexander who Paul delivered over to Satan so they would be taught not to blaspheme (notice this is one of the evils listed in II Tim. 3:2).

I Timothy 1:19-20 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and **suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.**²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, **so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.** NASB

Obviously, in I Tim. 1:19-20, Paul believes Hymenaeus and Alexander are two Christians who have fallen away from the Faith they once affirmed, for if he did not, how could they be taught anything by being delivered over to Satan. If they were not genuine Christians they would be dead in their trespasses and sin and so would be blinded by the god of this world so they should not see the light of the gospel of Christ (II Cor. 4:3-4). If they were unbelievers in Paul's mind, they would be incapable of being taught anything by being delivered over to Satan (for they would already be his), but rather they would need to be saved. So it seems because of the meaning of "form" and "godliness," if one translates this phrase as "having a form of godliness," one must accept that Paul is referring to Christians. The only way around this (if one begins with the presupposition that godliness is an inward grace) would be to assign a negative and inaccurate meaning to *μόρφωσις* (form), which the word does not seem to carry.

But, the problem, with what I said above, is that these teachers also included those who were unsaved (as we will presently see). So how can the phrase "form of godliness" be used in conjunction with those who are not true Christians? How do we reconcile Paul's use of the phrase a "form of godliness" with this understanding? The answer I believe is to be found in the participle *ἔχοντες*, and not the phrase *μόρφωσιν ἐνσεβείας* (form of godliness).

If we understand Paul to be saying that the teachers are either "holding to," or even "using" a form of godliness," one can see that some of those teachers could also be those who are not true Christians, but are unsaved men pretending to be saved. In other words, they are "holding onto" the form of godliness externally, but they do not have the form of godliness internally.

Here is an example of how this participle can be used both ways—i.e. of holding on to something externally, or, having, or possessing, something internally. These different uses can be clearly seen in these two verses.

Revelation 5:8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one **holding** (*ἔχοντες*) a

harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. NASB 1995

Jude 1:19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, **having** (ἔχοντες) not the Spirit. KJV

In the Rev. 5:8 they are clearly holding on to a harp which is not a part of them, but something external, whereas the same participle is used in Jude 1:19 of one not “having” the Holy Spirit within them, which bespeaks having something internally.

Consequently, if we adopt the former understanding we can see that they are capable of holding on to what Christians consider true godliness. But they are holding onto it externally, because they do not have it within. They are holding on to it externally, because it is advantageous for them to “use” it, or to “hold” to it for their own gain and advantages, just as they were doing in I Tim. 6:5 when they were using godliness to make money.²¹⁹

Thus, for example, a true characteristic of godliness or piety is to speak reverently of God, so they speak reverently of God. (But their speaking is really blasphemy because inwardly they are haters of good. But they speak outwardly in a reverent manner because it is advantageous for them to do so.) Or, as another example, a true characteristic of godliness is to worship on the Lord’s day, so they worship on the Lord’s day. So what they are doing is to “hold” on to outwardly those true forms of godliness. But they do not “have” or “possess” those true forms of godliness within, because they are unsaved. They “hold” to it for their own advantage. They “use” it, and are holding it from without, if you will, but they do not possess it, and so “have” it within.

The reason it seems we must understand that Paul intended the participle to include both nuances, is because the following characteristics indicate that some must have been unsaved, depending on how we understand the rest of this portion of Scripture.

²¹⁹ These, then, would be those men from within that group referred to in I Tim. 1:3 and I Tim. 6:5 who did not receive Timothy’s charge or admonition, i.e. assuming some did receive it and repent. In this case, they would then be those among the group referred to in I Tim. 1:3 and 6:5, who were not really Christians.

First, Paul says they have denied the power of godliness, which in a real sense is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ! True piety or godliness points to Him *who is Godliness*. He is the mystery of Godliness (I Tim. 3:16).

I Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. KJV

I Corinthians 1:24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. KJV

Thus their denial is like the denial of these unsaved men who were trying to use a form of godliness for their own advantages, just like those in Titus 1:16 and II Pet. 2:1 and Jude 1:4.

Titus 1:16 They **profess that they know God; but in works they deny him**, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. KJV

II Peter 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, **even denying the Lord that bought them**, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. KJV

Jude 1:4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, **and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ**. KJV

Secondly, Paul likens them to Jannes and Jambres.

II Timothy 3:8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. KJV

Now Jannes and Jambres were those idolatrous false magicians who tricked and deceived Pharaoh. They were those who withstood Moses, and, in so doing, were withstanding the LORD God (see Ex. 7:10-14).

Thirdly, Paul clearly says they are reprobate in regard to the Faith in the verse above. We will return to this phrase later and look at it in more detail, but it means they had no part of the Faith, which would mean they never had a part in the Faith, or they no longer have a part in the Faith.

Finally, Paul specifically refers to them as deceivers a few verses later in II Tim. 3:13, much like the wolves in sheep's clothing he warned the very same Church against in Acts 20:30. What Paul prophesied would happen in the Church in Ephesus, happened! (Also compare Matt. 7:15.)

II Timothy 3:13 But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived. NASB

Acts 20:29-32 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. ³² And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. KJV

Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. KJV

So for all these reasons, if one prefers this first perspective, where “form of godliness” is being used in its positive sense, it seems one must understand that the participle phrase must also be understood as “holding to a form of godliness,” rather than just “having a form of godliness,” for it seems some of these men were certainly unsaved. And that, maybe, is the reason why the Holy Spirit chose the Greek word ἔχοντες which could have both shades of meaning, “having” and/or “holding.” Sometimes Scripture intends a twofold application of a verse (e.g. Hosea 11:1 with Matt. 2:15).

For those teachers who were truly saved, but were backslidden, they would be those who “having” a form of godliness within, but who had backslid into a state wherein they rejected the power of that godliness, meaning not the godliness itself, but the power of that godliness. And, for those teachers who were not truly saved, but were sheep in wolf's clothing, they were “holding” to a form of godliness externally, without ever having that godliness within, so that they were denying the godliness itself and so its power also. They were simply using the outward form of godliness.

We should not forget that in the last days (or indeed any days) those who are truly saved can backslide and manifest “some” of these same fleshly characteristics as we mentioned before. Paul was very clear that true Christians can be taken captive by the empty deception and philosophies

of the world (Col. 2:8-9). If it was not possible, he would not have warned us. So we all should be vigilant and full of spiritual discernment.

2) Second Perspective—The form of godliness refers to Scripture, or the pattern of sound words

Let us now look at this verse from the second perspective, wherein the form of godliness refers to Scripture, or the pattern of sound words. This is a possibility and would be nearly equivalent to the same phrase in Rom. 2:20. Just as the Law is the *outward expression*, the *embodiment*, the *form* of knowledge and truth, so is the Scripture, the Gospel, the pattern of sound words, i.e. the Faith, the *outward expression*, the *embodiment*, the *form* of true piety or godliness. And since Paul is referring to the last days, it would include the entire canon of Scripture. In fact, at the time of Paul writing this Second Epistle to Timothy, it would have already included a majority of the New Testament, many of the books already having been written. So, in other words, if someone wished to have knowledge of the Truth in the Old Testament, they would look to the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. It was the outward form of “knowledge and truth” that people could possess, or have in their hands. In the same way, in the New Testament, if someone wished to understand what true “godliness and piety” was, they would look to the books of the New Testament—the Gospels, the Epistles, book of Revelation. (Of course, the two are interchangeable; “knowledge and truth” can also be found in the New Testament, and “godliness and piety” can be found in the Old Testament.)

So in this sense, one could say they had the form of godliness in their possession by possessing the Word of God, which would include the Old Testament (and at that time parts of the New Testament) and the pattern of sound words, i.e. the Faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

II Timothy 3:13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. ¹⁴ But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*; ¹⁵ And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. KJV

II Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. NASB

1 Timothy 3:9 Having (ἔχοντες) the mystery of the faith in pure conscience. (Geneva Version)

In fact, as one can see, in I Tim. 3:9 above, the same participial form of ἔχω is used in regard to “having” or “holding to” the Faith with a pure or clear conscience, which, obviously, these false teachers in I Tim. 6:5 would claim to also do, but in reality could not do, as their conscience would be defiled by their dissimulation.

Moreover, if true piety or godliness could be found in the Living Word, who was the mystery of godliness (I Tim. 3:16), one could certainly see how the Written Word, which bespeaks the Living Word, could be seen as a form that bespoke and revealed what true piety or godliness was, as Christ was revealed all through Scripture.

Luke 24:27, 44-45 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. ⁴⁴ And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. ⁴⁵ Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. KJV

Consequently, if one understands the phrase from this perspective, then the King James Version rendering of ἔχοντες as “having,” would once more become appropriate, for Paul would not, necessarily, be speaking of those men having the true inward grace of godliness within them, but Paul would be speaking of them “having” the true form of godliness in their possession, i.e. the Scripture, and/or the true Faith wherein godliness is known. With this second perspective regarding the form of godliness, those teachers could also refer to saved or unsaved men.

This perspective can be further reinforced by Paul’s next phrase that they have denied the power of it. Let us look at a few verses that where Paul speaks of those things having power, i.e. Scripture, including the Gospels, of course, and/or the Faith.

Hebrews 4:12 For the **word of God is living and powerful**, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. NKJV

Romans 1:16-19 For I am not ashamed **of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God** unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. KJV

II Thessalonians 1:11-12 for which also we do pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling, and may fulfil all the good pleasure of goodness, and **the work of the faith in power**, ¹² that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. Young’s Literal Translation

I Corinthians 1:24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God**, and the wisdom of God. KJV

So we see that Paul is saying these false teachers who are lovers of self, who are proud, who are blasphemers, who are unthankful and lovers of pleasure, have the form of godliness (i.e. Scripture), but they deny the power of it! They have the Gospel, but they deny the power of it! They have the Faith once for all delivered to the saints, but they deny the power of it! They cannot hold onto the mystery of the Faith in a clear conscience because their consciences have become defiled.

Consequently, whether one understands this portion in the second epistle to Timothy from the first perspective, or the second perspective, or maybe even from both perspectives—after all the beauty of Scripture is so deep that perhaps the Holy Spirit wants to understand all aspects of godliness and our need to walk by its power, whether from the power of Christ, who is the mystery of godliness, or the power of the writtn Word, which is the very embodiment of godliness for all, or the power of quiet spirit that has been filled with the inward grace of godliness—one can see the reason why Paul says they are counted rejected. They are rejected for they have rejected the godliness of God or the godliness that is from God, i.e. Scripture. (And this brings us back to verse 8.)

II Timothy 3:8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, **reprobate concerning the faith**. KJV

They are reprobate. In regard to this Greek word that is translated in the KJV as “reprobate,” and is translated as “rejected” in the NASB, W. E. Vine has this to say—

“ADOKIMOS ἄδοκιμος : signifying ‘**not standing the test,**’ rejected (*a*, negative, *dokimos*, approved), was primarily applied to metals (cp. Isaiah 1:22); it is used always in the NT in a Passive sense, (a) of things, Hebrews 6:8 , ‘rejected,’ of land that bears thorns and thistles; (b) of persons, Romans 1:28 , of a ‘reprobate mind,’ a mind of which God cannot approve, and which must be rejected by Him, the effect of refusing ‘to have God in their knowledge;’ ... **in 2 Timothy 3:8 of those ‘reprobate concerning the faith,’ i.e., men whose moral sense is perverted and whose minds are beclouded with their own speculations;** in Titus 1:16 , of the defiled, who are ‘unto every good work reprobate,’ i.e., **if they are put to the test** in regard to any good work (in contrast to their profession), **they can only be rejected.** In the Sept., Proverbs 25:4; Isaiah 1:22.”²²⁰

Notice that the word means not standing the test and so rejected. These teachers did not stand the test in regard to the Faith. In other words, they were being heretical in their doctrine. Thus they would be the same as those in Titus 3:10-11. Now, while the Greek word in and of itself does not indicate whether that one was saved or not (it is a word that is also is used of believers in a different sense, e.g. I Cor. 9:27), the Greek word does indicate by the context of its usage that they failed the test in regard to the Faith.

So, whether they were saved or not, they were not abiding in the Faith. They failed the test whose only standard is the Truth (also cf. Titus 1:15-16).

In any case, despite one’s opinion regarding whether they ever believed, or not, the fact remains that Paul is telling Timothy they are counted rejected, either as wolves in sheep’s clothing, or as those Christians like Hymenaeus and Alexander in I Tim. 1:19-20, who had fallen away from the Faith. As such, Timothy is commanded, or, perhaps, we might say, he is reminded that he must continue to be “turned away” from such as Paul commands in II Tim. 3:5.

II Timothy 3:5 having a form of piety, and its power having denied; **and from these be turning away.** Young’s Literal Translation

As such, this now brings us to the conclusion of the passage of Scripture in regard to discipline. The Greek word used here that is translated as “turn away,” is the Greek word ἀποτρέπω, which is made up of the

²²⁰ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. III, pg. 283

preposition *ἀπό*, meaning from or away, and the verb *τρέπω*, which means “to turn.” This is a completely different word than Paul uses in I Tim. 6:5. If you remember, the Greek word there meant to “stand apart” and so, to “stand against.”

It is as if, at first, Timothy admonished the false teachers in I Tim. 1:3, as Titus was told to admonish those teachers in Crete who taught strange doctrines. In that first warning, he stood apart from them for all in the Church to see. He stood against their teaching and charged them to stop paying attention to those myths and endless genealogies that were so contrary to the Faith. Then, presumably, the second warning or admonition would have been given to any who did not heed his first charge. Hopefully, some did heed his charge and so repented, but, obviously, some did not, for false teachers (presumably from the same group of those who were first charged) were still causing problems, going from house to house, looking to gain followers to their heretical teaching (II Tim.3:6).

Now, it should be mentioned that most believe there were approximately two years, or maybe three years between Paul’s first epistle to Timothy and his second epistle to Timothy, during which interval the epistle to Titus was also written. But, if one remembers, the whole procedure of giving one and two admonishments, and then rejection, would take up at the most, in all likelihood, sixty days. Most certainly, I do not believe it would take up one to two years! Therefore, according to Paul’s procedure of discipline in these types of cases, these false teachers would have already been excommunicated, i.e. rejected in regard to the Faith, by the time he wrote this second epistle to Timothy. And, of course, this is confirmed, for Paul clearly says they are already characterized as ones “reprobate (rejected) in regard to the Faith.

Consequently, according to Paul’s procedure for such heretics, these teachers would have already been rejected and excommunicated. As such, Paul’s command to Timothy to turn away from them could not refer to any present act of excommunication, but rather would refer to his need to continue in that act of excommunication. The Greek verb that Paul uses, *ἀποτρέπου* (turn away), he uses in the imperative mood, which means this is an apostolic command by Paul, and in the present tense and middle voice, which in this context, seems to indicate that Paul is emphasizing the ongoing need for Timothy to continue in this act of “turning away,” which in the context would make the excommunication of the past to be the initial act of “turning away,” something that

occurred after his first “standing apart.” One could say that Paul was instructing Timothy to maintain your turning away from those false teachers, or, for Timothy to *continue on with your previous act of turning away from them*.

Thus Paul would be exhorting Timothy to be strong in the Lord in those cases where discipline is needed within the Assembly. He is to lead by example, for Paul knows full well that as time goes by, many saints will eventually succumb to such heresies that deny the power of godliness. In fact, this is exactly what Paul prophesies in the next chapter!

II Timothy 4:1-4 I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.** ³ For the **time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine**; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; ⁴ **and will turn away their ears from the truth**, and will turn aside to myths. NASB

And, since Paul frames this portion of Timothy as being part of the “last days,” this admonition is for us as well, and to every brother in Christ who is gifted to be an elder in the Assembly. Paul is exhorting us all to be strong in the Lord and in our resolve to reject all those who ignore all admonitions and continue in a denial of the power of all godliness.

We should stand firm against those who deny Verbal Plenary Inspiration of Scripture, who by that denial are denying the power of godliness that is Scripture. We should continue in our “standing apart” and are “turning away” from such treatments of God’s Sacred Word.

Or, if we prefer to understand this form of godliness that is the Faith, once and for all delivered to the saints, i.e. as the pattern of sound words given to us by the Holy Spirit in Scripture, then we must be resolved to turn away from all who would claim they are “holding” to the Faith, but in reality are denying the Faith, by denying the power of godliness that is the Lord Jesus Christ—the mystery of godliness. In this regard, a wholesale departure from the Faith has been occurring since the 20th century in Christendom, especially in Churches who call themselves Evangelical, by the recent denial of the Only-Begotten and His eternal generation or begetting from the Father. In just a few decades, the doctrine of the Only-Begotten has been excised out of modern translations and the doctrine of eternal generation has been succinctly

obscured. May God forgive such teachers, for they are misleading an entire generation of Christians who are not aware of this alteration of the Historic Christian Faith and are robbing them its power. Their spiritual inheritance, as borne witness to in the Historic Christian Faith has been taken away, and the beauty of the Father's Only-Begotten, who was begotten before all time, has been marred. This is a departure from the Historic Christian Faith and all who continue to deny the doctrine of the Only-Begotten after one and two admonitions should be rejected, for they have rejected the Faith.

As such, the apostle Paul's exhortation to us, based upon this exhortation to Timothy, would be to continue in our standing apart and in our turning away from such treatments of the Faith once and for all delivered to the saints. When one rejects the Son's eternal generation or "going forth" from the eternal Father, they are altering the Faith, by their lack of faith in the Only-Begotten. They reject the doctrine of eternal generation because it seems theologically illogical to them, but they do not apply the same strictures to the Virgin birth. They accept that by faith, though it does not, necessarily, make logical sense in all its aspects. (And the sad fact is, for leaven spreads slowly, given time, those who reject the doctrine of the Only-Begotten, will one day, more than likely, finally reject the Virgin birth also.) To all this we must remain resolved to be turned away.

We must remember our loyalty and commitment must be first to the Lord and to His revelation. Why? Because love does, indeed, produce loyalty and commitment, and if the Lord Jesus is to be our first love, our loyalty and commitment must be first to Him.

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." **Rev. 2:4**

In other words, we must be first faithful to Him and to the Faith that was delivered to the Church. We must put our respect for the Lord and His Faith before any respect we might have for our Christian leaders and teachers who are holding to a form of godliness, but are denying the power.

Now, I know that all the negative adjectives of II Tim. 3:1-3 would not apply to those Christian leaders who are beginning this drift and departure from the Faith. I do not believe many of these Christian teachers, should be characterized as revilers, unholy, unloving, brutal or

haters of good, etc. God forbid! But unfortunately, some of those adjectives could apply to them (and, unfortunately to us all if we are not careful—oh, how we all need the mercy of the Lord). Some are arrogant (I have experienced such arrogance myself in dialogue with them). Some are boastful (looking down in condescension on those who disagree with them). And, most assuredly, many are lovers of self, for many of the same teachers also embrace the wisdom of the world in their Christian walk, by their adherence to what used to be called “Christian Psychology,” wherein self-love and self-esteem is taught, rather than the cross being taught with a denial of self. Paul said he was shown by God to never trust in himself (II Cor. 1:9). But many of the same teachers are teaching the opposite. They teach Christians to have self-love, and self-confidence, and to believe in themselves, which is the opposite of what Paul teaches us in II Cor. 1:9!

These all, most certainly, are adjectives that apply to many modern teachers who have a form of godliness in regard to the Faith, but have denied the power of it (at least, in regard to the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father). And because of this, beloved, the apostolic command to Timothy, must become an apostolic command to our own hearts to remain faithful to the Faith and the mystery of godliness and the form of godliness from any perspective wherein we view it. For our love and loyalty must first be to our Lord. This passage from Timothy is most applicable to us today. It matters not if the rejection of the Faith is by one unsaved, or by one saved; both require us to “turn away” from such.

Prideful Sins—II Thessalonians 3:6-12

II Thessalonians 3:6-12 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an **unruly** (disorderly-KJV) life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an **undisciplined manner** among you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; ⁹ not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you are leading an **undisciplined** (disorderly-KJV) life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. NASB

We now come to the last two major portions of Scripture dealing with discipline within the Assembly. These verses are in II Thess. 3:6, 11-12 and then II Thess. 3:14. Let us first examine II Thessalonians 3:6, 11-12 which deals with disorderly sins, and then we will examine II Thess. 3:14 separately in the next chapter.

The word “disorderly” in the KJV, which is translated in the NASB as *unruly* and *undisciplined*, in verses 6 and 11 above is a word that was often used of soldiers in an army who were resisting the structure or order of military life, and/or ignoring certain orders given to them in battle. Such soldiers would be accused with disorderly conduct, if you will. Both the adverb and the verb and the adjectival form are used by Paul in his first epistle to the Thessalonians.

In the third chapter of the epistle, the adverb (ἀτάκτως) is used in verse 6 and 11, and the verb (ἀτακτέω) is used in verse 7. The adverb is defined by W. E. Vine as follows:

“ATAKTŌS (ἀτάκτως) signifies disorderly, with slackness (like soldiers not keeping rank).” ²²¹

²²¹ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. I, pg. 320

And the verb is defined thus:

“ATAKTEŌ (ἀτακτέω) signifies to be out of rank, out of one's place, undisciplined, to behave disorderly: in the military sense, to break rank; negatively in 2 Thessalonians 3:7, of the example set by the Apostle and his fellow missionaries, in working for their bread while they were at Thessalonica so as not to burden the saints.”²²²

So we see its adverbial form (ἀτάκτως) used in verse 6 and 11, its verbal form (ἀτακτέω) used in verse 7, which leaves us with its adjectival form (ἀτάκτους), which Paul uses in I Thess. 5:14.

I Thessalonians 5:14 And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the **disorderly** (ἀτάκτους), encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all. ASV

W. E. Vine also provides this helpful comment on this adjectival form of the word.

“ATAKOS (ἄτακτος) signifies not keeping order (*a*, negative, *tasso*, to put in order, arrange); it was especially a military term, denoting not keeping rank, insubordinate; it is used in 1 Thess. 5:14, describing certain church members who manifested an insubordinate spirit, whether by excitability or officiousness or idleness.”²²³

These are the only places where this word is used in the New Testament in its varied forms. But it should be noted that this does not mean that Paul intended the Church to be run like an army, for the Greek word was also used of society, wherein citizens were expected to behave properly (Josephus, *Apn.* 2:151), and it was used contextually in regard to worship, both from the Old Testament and the New Testament by Clement (the co-worker of Paul) in his epistle to the Corinthians (I Clement 40:2f.), in which epistle he states that worship should be orderly, not disorderly. It seems it has more to do with someone who chafes at authority, someone who is always at odds with authority, someone who is beginning to cause problems in the Assembly, someone who is disobeying some portion of Scripture. Therefore, we see that we cannot limit it to its military connotation, for Paul is concerned for all kinds of disorder.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

For example, Paul is also concerned that widows not walk disorderly (and obviously Paul would not consider them to be a soldier in the ranks) in I Tim. 5:11-14. Now while he does not specifically use this word in the passage he does refer to it as the same activity that he does label disorderly. Thus, in this sense, he would consider a household to be a place where order should be maintained, since he counseled such young widows to get married and bear children and keep house.

And, of course, in the passage before us, Paul uses it of ones who refuse to work. This would be considered disorderly for it was God Himself who ordered Adam, which, of course, would extend to all mankind, to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow (Gen. 3:19). When one refuses to work, one who is perfectly capable of work, one is disobeying the creational order of God.

So, we can see that Paul never intended disorderly conduct to be limited to any one thing, but was unlimited in its application, especially when he used it in I Thess. 5:14. The adjectival form is even used in extra-biblical writings for the “unruly” impulses of sin that passed from Adam to all men and women.

Thus, we can see that disorderliness is a condition of our fallen human nature and so should be avoided by all Christians, as we would avoid sin.

Paul was careful to avoid it when he pointed out to the Church in Thessalonica that he and those with him were careful to not act disorderly when they were in their midst.

II Thessalonians 3:7 For yourselves know how ye ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves **disorderly** among you. ASV

Why is this so important to the Christian? It is important because our God is a God of order.

There is the order of His Being, wherein the Father is the first Person of the Godhead and unbegotten, the Son who is eternally begotten is the second Person, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the Son is the third Person, as our Lord revealed in order of the Name in Matt. 28:19.

There is an order of source and life, wherein the Father gives the Son to have life in Himself (John 5:26) and the Spirit, who is known as the Water of life, is the Person who proceeds from the throne of God and of

the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). Indeed, everything about God is orderly, for God is perfect and the opposite of perfection is confusion and disorderliness, and Paul specifically tells us that God is not a God of confusion.

I Corinthians 14:33 for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. NASB

I Corinthians 14:33 For God is not *a God* of disorder but of peace, as in all the Assemblies of the saints. Darby's Version

Therefore, since the Christian should reflect the character of God, we should never act in a disorderly manner, for that is not from God. As Paul says, we should do all things decently and in order.

I Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and **in order**. KJV

As such, all disorderliness is not from above, but from below and so should be rejected and avoided in every way.

James 3:16-18 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, **there is disorder** and every evil thing.¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. NASB

And, since we are called to imitate Paul as He imitated Christ (I Cor. 11:1), and as Christ walked in perfection and order, doing nothing from himself, but only as He heard from the Father (John 5:19), the Christian should walk in the same manner (I John 2:6). A Christian should be a *light* to the world, as He is the *Light* of the world (Matt. 5:14; John 8:12). We should show forth orderliness in our marriages (Eph. 5:22-33), in our families (Eph. 6:1-4), in our Assemblies (I Cor. 14:40), in our work ethic (II Thess. 3:10-12), and, finally, within society (Rom. 13:1-8). A Christian should never allow this aspect of our fallen human nature to abide, for it does not bring glory to God. Because of this, disorderly sins in Scripture sometimes require Assembly discipline as we will now see.

Paul tells us in II Thess. 3:6 that we should “keep aloof” from those who walk disorderly. The Greek word translated “keep aloof” in the NASB is the Greek word στέλλω. It carried the idea in ancient times of being “circumspect,” as one “not forth coming.” Perhaps, in modern terms we might compare it to the phrase “act reserved toward,” which conveys the idea of “withdraw” as given in the KJV. However, there is no idea of

“rejection” or “removing” such a person from the Assembly; disorderly sins do not rise to the level of sins requiring excommunication. Rather the idea is that the Assembly, in one sense, slightly “removes” itself from those leading a disorderly life, those who act as busybodies.

The word, according to W.E. Vine, also means the following: “to gather up...(used of the furling of sails), and hence, in the middle voice, signifies to shrink from any person or thing, 2 Thess. 3:6, ‘withdraw’...”²²⁴

In one extra-biblical text it is used for an expression on one’s face as mentioned by Liddell & Scott; they list the very same infinitive that Paul uses, wherein they gloss it as follows: “στέλλεσθαι *to draw up one’s face, look rueful*, A. B. 62.”²²⁵ Of course, in that context it is used differently in that it is an expression of regret, rather than disapproval, but it is interesting because it bespeaks of something being made known to others. And with that being the case, one can see that Paul is indicating that the saints should somehow in love make known their disapproval to the Christian acting disorderly in the Assembly. But they ought never to do it with disdain, but in love.

For example, perhaps, one might privately say with concern and kindness, “Brother, our Lord tells us to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. Do you not think it would be better if you find a job, so you can support yourself, your family, and have something to be able to give to others in need? It was Jesus who said it is more blessed to give than to receive, and did he not “give” us so much when he died on the cross?”

Or, perhaps, an elder might come to the side of the brother and say that “the apostle Paul tells us that if we do not provide for our own household we are worse than an infidel, and so you should take that to heart and work hard in love for your family. Did not our Lord, in one sense, work hard for us to the point of exhaustion on the cross when he suffered and died for us? If he loved us so much, should we not love our families and our brethren and work hard for them? After all, even an eight hour’s day of work could never repay what we owe the Saviour, but an eight hour day will provide food for your family.”

²²⁴ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981) vol. IV, pg. 223-224

²²⁵ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, Seventh Edition* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1883) pg. 1424-25

So we can see that such disorderly conduct carries no sense of excommunication, but rather some form or expression of disapproval to such a one for their actions and attitudes, if not vocally, at first, then silently, presumably, for the goal of them asking, “What is wrong? Why are you acting reserved? Did I do something to offend you?” Then one has the opportunity to explain the reason for such hesitancy or emotional withdrawal toward that brother or sister.

In one basic, sense, Paul is saying we should never condone such disorderly conduct and act as if such conduct is perfectly acceptable. After a gracious period of time, the exhortation of “if anyone will not work, neither let him eat,” must become an injunction that is enforced. Such disorderly conduct must not be allowed to continue in the Assembly, for in the end all disorderliness is hurtful to other believers, whether such believers are family members, or members of the body of Christ.

Of course, it goes without saying that such conduct must be willful and purposeful and not just a temporary lapse of judgment because of some distress, or some unfortunate situation. The word “disorderly” bespeaks more of a willful and rigid mindset that is expressed in stubbornness and rebellion. As such, it also would never apply to one who cannot work because of sickness, lack of work, or some other reason beyond one’s control.

Finally, if such actions of disapproval by the Assembly do not result in a change of course in the Christian, if such a one continues to act in a disorderly way, what should the Assembly then do? Paul gives further instructions to the Assembly, in regard to this matter, in verse 14 of the same chapter. But, as we shall see, even this further discipline does not yet result in excommunication as occurred in Titus 3:10-11 and II Tim. 3:1-8.

Disorderly Sins—II Thessalonians 3:14

II Thessalonians 3:14-15 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.¹⁵ Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother. KJV

We finished the last chapter with a question as to what should be done if the disorderly person does not respond to the “aloofness” of the saints. This verse now gives us further instructions in this regard. II Thess. 3:14 instructs each personal individual in the Assembly to “make a mental note” regarding such a person that is not walking rightly.

The Greek verb σημειοῦσθε that is translated as “note” is in the present tense and middle voice. The middle voice tells us the action of the verb by the subject has some effect upon the subject. Thus the “noting” of that person is something that is done internally and not some external public censure. It does not say anything about expelling such a person, or publicly bringing his behavior before the Assembly. It says that each individual Christian should be discerning about whom they closely fellowship with. It could be translated as follows, “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, take a mental note of that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

Some might take the Kings James Version’s translation the wrong way and assume that Paul is saying to publically censure that individual. Because of this I think the NASB better brings out the full force of the middle voice by translating it as “take special note.”

Nevertheless, the verse does tell us to not “associate” with such a person. It does tell us to not freely “mingle” with such a person, as if nothing is wrong. It is the same word that is used in I Cor. 5:11 when Paul says not to “mingle” or “keep company” with the sinner mentioned in that chapter. But, it should be noted that nowhere in this passage does it say such a person should be excommunicated, or removed from the Assembly as Paul says in I Cor. 5:13.

This fact, coupled with the immediate context of the passage, (i.e. the admonition of II Thess. 3:6), tells us that this “avoidance” must be accomplished, not by the removal of the person from the Assembly, but, in one sense, by the removal of the Assembly from freely mingling with

the person! Paul is telling the saints to go one step further than the aforementioned aloofness. One can include someone in a certain activity and still act somewhat reserved, but now Paul says, so to speak, to not even include the person in the activity! It should be noted, though, that Paul does not include the added restriction of not eating even with such a one a person, as he did in I Cor. 5:11, showing again that this “mingling” is not as severe as it was with the case in Corinth, because the person will still be in the Assembly, and so, will still be present at the Lord’s Table.

One point that is interesting, since the original word for “disorderly” was used of a soldier in the ranks, this Greek word for not “keeping company,” or for not “mingling” with a person is also used within the context of soldiers. Josephus uses the word in a military context in his autobiography (Life of Flavius Josephus, 1.47).

So, perhaps, we might use this context to help explain Paul’s command to the Assembly. In an army, other soldiers on duty may have no choice to accept a fellow soldier that is disorderly, that is always challenging authority, and always seeming to be causing problems for them. They may still eat with him and hail him in the course of their duty, but once they are off duty, they do not need to freely “mingle” with such a one. They do not need to include him in their off duty activities. This is how the word is being used differently than it was in I Cor. 5:11. In I Cor. 5:11 it was being used of someone who is no longer in the Church; in this verse it is being used of someone who still is in the Church. One was not supposed to even eat with the one in I Cor. 5:11 or given him or her a greeting or Godspeed, but in this verse one could still eat with the disorderly person and give him or her a reserved, but friendly greeting, but in it all they were to act reserved and not freely associate with them in some way so that the person notices the difference.

The whole idea of such reticence is so that the person can be “humbled” or “embarrassed” by the personal avoidance of the other saints, as Paul says in the next phrase after telling the Thessalonians to not associate with the person. He states that the reason to not keep company with the person was so “that he may be ashamed.” (The actual form of the word “ashamed” in this verse is only used twice in the NT and once in the LXX. It is the translation of “humble” in II Chron. 7:14 in the LXX and is also translated “embarrassed.” It also can carry the idea of “repentance” or “turning about.”) Paul’s desire is that such a person would be embarrassed and humbled by the “reticence” of the saints,

thereby leading such a one to repentance. Paul clearly says to not treat him as an enemy, but to lovingly admonish him as a brother (vs. 15).

This is how the discipline of II Thess. 3:14 is one step further than the discipline of II Thess. 3:6, yet not as far as the discipline of I Cor. 5:11. However, it should be noted that if the person does not repent from this added discipline, and the behavior becomes so disorderly that it becomes a “way of life,” wherein many are hurt and many are taken financially advantage of by the one refusing to work, then it seems that such a brother or sister would fall into the category of a covetous person. And if such a one becomes so overt in their disorderliness and chaffing at authority that they begin to revile those in authority, then it seems such a one would fall into the category of a “reviler.” If that happened, then it seems they would fall into the required discipline of I Cor. 5:11-13, wherein they would be publicly censored and removed from the Assembly.

The point is, II Thess. 3:14 does not instruct us to use any type of public censor and removal, so, obviously, the behavior by the offending party in question cannot be of the same degree of those sins mentioned in I Cor. 5:11, (otherwise Paul would not just say to “avoid” such a one, but would also say to “not eat with such a one,” and to “remove” such a one from your midst, as he did in I Cor. 5:11,13).

Public censure and removal only becomes necessary if the disobedience becomes so strong that the person begins to revile the ones God puts into authority, and the person continues to “take” without ever being willing to work. That person then becomes a “reviler” and must be dealt according to the principles of I Cor. 5, or, as we said, they become covetous by their living off of others hard work and so must also be dealt with by the discipline of I Cor. 5.

W.E. Vine has this to say regarding this portion of Scripture--“The discipline of this section falls short in severity of that enjoined in the very different case of I Corinthians 5. Evidently “have no company with” equals “withdraw from,” v. 6, and neither expression seems appropriated to describe excommunication, or, indeed, formal action of any kind.”²²⁶

²²⁶ W. E. Vine, *The Collected Writings of W. E. Vine, Volume 3* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1996) pg. 135-136

And so this concludes our section on all the different forms of disciplines ordered by the Holy Spirit for the spiritual well-being of the saints and every Church of Christ. Amen.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

–Hebrews 12:5-11 NKJV

Books from Assembly Bookshelf

Anthony Norris Groves

On the Nature of Christian Influence

George Cutting

Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment

B. P. Harris

Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren:
As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated
Version)

Church Principles of the New Testament, Vol. I

Church Principles of the New Testament, Vol. II

Our Worship is Important

Press on to Spirituality

Studies in the Usage of the Greek Word *Μονογενής*

The Christian and Difficult Times in the 21st Century

Understanding the Trinity

Upon this Rock: An Exposition of the Glories of Christ in
Matthew 16:13-18, Along with the Foundation of the Faith

The Gospel According to Matthew: Notes and Comments, Part I

The Gospel According to Matthew: Notes and Comments, Part II

Sermon on the Mount: An In Depth Study

What is Biblical Discipleship?

What is Revival? Should Brethren in the Lord Pray for Revival?

**If one would like to freely download these books in digital format, they are
available at www.silicabiblechapel.com**

About the author:

B. P. Harris is an elder in the Church that meets in The Bible Chapel in Sacramento, CA. He was saved at a young age in 1959 at Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, CA, during the ministry of J. Vernon McGee, and now resides in Northern California where he has been happily married for over 39 years.