

WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP

by Kevin Rutherford

What should a congregation do with a sexually immoral member who refuses to repent? The church should “deliver such a one to Satan.” (1 Corinthians 5:5) In other words, the local congregation must “purge out the old leaven.” (1 Corinthians 5:7) To state it another way the church must not “...keep company with sexually immoral...” members (1 Corinthians 5:9)

Do these commands apply to publicly known sins other than sexual immorality? Hear what Paul said, “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.” (1 Corinthians 5:11)

What should a congregation do with those brethren who cause division with false doctrine? Paul said “note them” and “avoid them.” (Romans 16:17, 18) The book of Titus says “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.” (Titus 3:10)

What should a congregation do with fellow Christians who are living for Satan instead of Jesus? Paul told the church at Thessalonica to warn them (1 Thessalonians 5:14). If they refuse to repent and continue to “walk disorderly” what should a church do? Read Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 3:6. “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.” Later in the same chapter we read, “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” (1 Thessalonians 3:14, 15)

Why should the church withdraw fellowship from erring brethren who refuse to repent? One very obvious reason is to obey God. God’s commands in this regard are clear. A second reason to withdraw fellowship from erring brethren who refuse to repent is to keep the church pure (Ephesians 5:27). This is what Paul meant when he said, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven...” (1 Corinthians 5:6, 7). A third reason to withdraw fellowship from the disorderly is to make them feel ashamed in the hopes that such shame will cause them to repent (1 Corinthians 5:5, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15).

Erring Christians should lovingly be encouraged to repent. When it becomes clear they will not, then they should lovingly be withdrawn from. Once they have been withdrawn from any further contact made must be to admonish them in love to repent. This is God’s command. This must be done.