
Words of Truth

Withdrawing From The Erring Is Not Just A Formality

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A brother in Christ errs. After you have examined yourself, you have decided you are in a position to approach him (Matthew 7:1-5 and Galatians 6:1-2). You begin talking to him about his sin (James 5:19-20 and Jude 1:22-23). He rejects your efforts to help him be restored. He knows that, within a short period of time, he is going to face the brethren and disciplinary actions will have to be taken. He, being the ignorant person he is, chooses to send an email to the congregation “removing his membership” thinking that he is avoiding being “withdrawn from.” Why does he think this? Where did the “I’ll leave before you can withdraw from me” idea come from? He thinks this because churches of Christ have misunderstood and miss-teach about what it means to withdraw from someone.

Many have taught and think that you are a member of a congregation until you receive some formal letter from a congregation. Many think that withdrawing from someone is only a congregational action and can only happen by members within the same congregation. Is that what the Scriptures teach? NO! The Scriptures do not teach these misconceived ideas. I have taught on this in times past and have mentioned some of these misconceptions in classes and articles (i.e. <https://www.wordsoftruth.net/wotvol17/wotbulletin12252016.html>). I know personally that traditions die hard. Therefore, the following is a study for us all to consider concerning what it means when you, I, or we withdraw ourselves from an erring saint. First, let’s just start off by reading some Scriptures.

Here Is What The Word Of God Actually States

In regard to a private situation wherein one disciple sins against another, note how the unrepentant brother is no longer esteemed as a brother: *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 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 publican. 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. 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. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:15-20).

In regard to those saints who cause division, strife, contentions [debates], etc.; notice what the Lord says: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 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 avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself”* (Romans 16:17-18 and Titus 3:9-11).

In regard to a member of the congregation that sins, in a manner such as the act of fornication (I Corinthians 5:1-4): *“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. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 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: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat”* (I Corinthians 5:9-11).

When a brother walks disorderly, even in a matter such as not working a job to care for his needs (II Thessalonians 3:6-15), we read this: *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.... 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. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”* (II Thessalonians 3:6; 14-15).

The term “withdraw” means to: “abstain from associating with: - avoid, withdraw self” (Strong’s # 4724). The Lord says not to keep company with the erring, but rather mark and avoid them. In each of the various situations noted above, you see a severing of the brotherly relationship. These actions are not limited to congregational action nor is it just for local saints (I Timothy 1:19-20, I Timothy 6:3-5, and II Timothy 3:1-5).

Conclusion

The formality concept that has been practiced and taught amongst churches of Christ in recent years is all wrong. It should be a common understanding that faithful saints cannot keep company with those erring from the faith (II Corinthians 6:14-18 and Ephesians 5:6-11). If you choose to keep company with the erring, you are guilty by association (II John 1:9-11).