

An Exercise To Discern Both Good and Evil (Hebrews 5:14)

He's Such A Nice Person

Scenario:

A man begins to assemble regularly with the congregation. Over some time, this man becomes well-liked among the saints. He is very hospitable. He has accounted to the saints that he obeyed the Gospel many years ago. He seems to agree with everything that is being taught. When spiritual discussions occur, he comes down on the right side of things. Though he assembles with the congregation, he has not wanted to join the fellowship of the saints. He wants to continue to just visit with us. As time passes, a few of the brethren urge him to become a member of the congregation. He states that he likes to just visit with congregations and does not want to become too involved. The brethren attempt to persuade him otherwise, but to no avail. Among later questions, those whom have attempted to have him join the local fellowship report to the congregation that this man oddly wants to keep his distance.

Statement That Arises From Our Scenario:

One of the brethren in this public statement says: "We need to be cautious with this man. He says he wants to keep his distance, but he has become very influential among some of our members. We need to be aware that he could be a wolf among us."

A Later Statement Is Made:

One of the members of the congregation says: "This brother in Christ is too nice to be a threat to our congregation. He just doesn't want to be a member here, but he is still our brother. We should not make false charges. He is such a nice person. It is wrong for us to say otherwise. He has done nothing to deserve that conclusion."

For Discussion: What do you see in those statements?

- We should all love the prospect of the local family of God having a potentially new member. If we love brethren as we should (**I Thessalonians 4:9**), the prospect of a larger spiritual family should be edifying. We also know there has to be caution (**Jude 1:3-4**). This is especially true, in a point addressed later in these notes, when someone wants someone into his/her home while desiring to "keep his distance."
- A brother in Christ being hospitable can be a really good thing (**Romans 12:13** and **I Peter 4:9**). However, it can also be a very dangerous thing (**Proverbs 23:1-3; 23:6-8**). Motives are very hard to see.
- There is a clear distinction in the Scriptures about those who are brethren, but not "one of you" and those who are "one of you". Such is in regard to being a member of that specific, local congregation (**Colossians 4:7-16**).
- Language such as those "among you" indicates membership within a local congregation (**Romans 12:1-3, I Corinthians 1:10-11, I Corinthians 3:18, I Corinthians 5:1-2, I Corinthians 6:1-8, I Corinthians 11:18-33, I Corinthians**

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15:12, II Corinthians 1:19, Ephesians 5:3, Colossians 4:16, I Thessalonians 5:12, II Thessalonians 3:11, James 1:26, James 3:13, James 4:1, James 5:13-14, I Peter 5:1-4, and Revelation 2:13).

- Local membership is a clear, Scriptural principal (**I Corinthians 12:14-27**).
- What made up the churches in Jerusalem, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.? Was it a bunch of people visiting the city? Clearly not (i.e. **I Corinthians 1:2, II Corinthians 1:1**, etc.)! We are “members one of another” (**Romans 12:4-5**).
- Being a member is not just about a physical presence either (**I Corinthians 12:26**).
- Being a member of a congregation puts you into submission to the scriptural leadership (**Hebrews 13:7; 13:17** and **I Peter 5:1-4**) and of each member (**Ephesians 5:21**). Is that what this man wants to avoid? If so, why?
- Without local membership, God’s disciplinary plan for the erring to be saved cannot work. How do you have someone removed from among you when they are not and have not really been among you (**Matthew 18:15-17, I Corinthians 5:1-13**, and **II Thessalonians 3:6; 3:14-15**)? Think about this, most of the time people don’t want to be a member of a local congregation because they do NOT want to be subject to disciplinary measures. They want to avoid accountability. That should be a huge red flag if it is the case.
- Not wanting to be in the fellowship of the saints is a very concerning thought. Fellowship is established, Scripturally, by maintained faithfulness to our Lord (**I John 1:3-7**). Thus, not wanting to be in the fellowship of brethren is like saying one wants to go to Heaven provided they can get their own, private spot. While the subject matter of this discernment is not fellowship per-se, fellowship is not limited to local membership (i.e. **Philippians 1:5; Philippians 4:10-18**). Thus, one has to wonder what the point is there? Also, why he doesn’t want to jointly participate in all things with the saints locally. He is assembling. He is being hospitable. What’s he wanting to keep himself from?
- The public statement made by one of the brethren is spot on regarding an outsider who has influence among the saints (**Matthew 7:15-20, Philippians 3:2**, and **Colossians 2:4-8**). Awareness even applies to those that are already within (**Acts 20:28-31**).
- Because he appears to be in agreement with things taught, people drop their guard. This is common in so-called “churches of Christ”. What he verbally expresses though, if we know and understand the truth, shouldn’t be enough for us (**Titus 1:16**).
- We should also know that those in the “unity and diversity” error will go along to get along. If he is of that mindset, he will think that worshipping with the brethren is okay as long as he is not a member. What foolishness! Unity in diversity is contrary to God’s will (**Amos 3:3, John 17:20-23, Romans 16:17-18, I Corinthians 1:10, II Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 4:1-6, Philippians 2:2, Philippians 3:16, II John 1:9-11**, and **Revelation 2:14-16**).
- Someone who does not want to become “too involved” is problematic. How can someone obey instructions such as **Romans 12:10, Romans 12:15-16, Galatians 6:1-2**, etc.; without being involved with the saints? What is “too involved”? How

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can you love your brethren without being involved (**I John 3:11-18** and **I John 4:7-21**)?

- He doesn't want to be one of us... Think about this: *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us"* (**I John 2:19**).
- The idea that someone is not a threat because that person is nice is foolish (**Psalms 12:1-3, Psalms 28:3, Psalms 55:21, Proverbs 10:18, Proverbs 14:15, Proverbs 20:19, Proverbs 26:20-28, Jeremiah 5:26, Jeremiah 9:3-8, Jeremiah 18:18-22, Matthew 23:27-28, Matthew 26:18-25; 26:47-48, Romans 16:17-18, Ephesians 5:6-11, and II Peter 2:18-22**).
- Furthermore, the principle of the "nice guy" has us judging appearances (**John 7:24**) instead of fruit (**Matthew 7:15-20**). This prejudice is used in job interviews, jury trials (why lawyers have their clients dress a certain way, etc.), etc.
- There was no false charge made. The statement was one of caution, which we've seen is right and certainly warranted. The statement that he could be a wolf among us is Scriptural, which we have also proven right! There was no conclusion. Being cautious has nothing to do with what a person has or has not done to deserve anything. We are taught to be cautious (**I John 4:1**) and to test all things (**I Thessalonians 5:21**).
- The person making the later statement should cause some concern. Why the appearance of an allegiance with an outsider? Why is this person defensive? A warning is a warning (**Philippians 3:2**), not a charge/accusation.
- That being said, a person considered a brother or sister that decides he or she wants to be some kind of permanent "visitor", is acting beyond the Scriptures. That is sinful (**I John 3:4** and **Revelation 22:18-19**). Therefore, at some point, a charge does need to be made. As an evangelist, I would be meeting with this man quickly to study these things privately and I would then begin to teach them publicly (**II Timothy 4:1-5**).
- Regarding the statement: "He has done nothing to deserve that conclusion"... First, there is no "conclusion". There was just a cautious warning. When Jesus told the twelve to "beware of men" (**Matthew 10:17**), that was not taken as a charge against all. It was a caution for a reason (**Matthew 10:17-25**).
- Having said that, back to, "He has done nothing to deserve that conclusion"... What has he done to earn trust, other than being "nice"? Consider how the disciples responded to Saul's [aka Paul] conversion and what it took to prove otherwise (**Acts 9:1-31**). Add to that fact that saints needed confirmation of the faithfulness of others who traveled (**Acts 15:40-41, Acts 18:24-28, Romans 16:1-2, and III John 1:12**).
- It is a difficult balance of receiving faithful saints (**II John 1:9-11**) vs. not being receptive at all to those who come from outside of the congregation (**III John 1:1-11**).
- In this case, a LOT of teaching and learning needs to occur.