

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, June 24, 2018

Church Discipline – Part 4

This week, we will take up where we left off in our analysis of Church Discipline (Part 1 preached on 11/19/2017, part 2 preached on 2/11/2018, part 3 preached on 4/29/18). Recall that we are considering discipline under these three headings:

1. **Formative** (Teach, Instruct, Edify, Train, Nurture, Exhort, Provoke)
2. **Corrective** (Rebuke, Admonish, Correct, Chasten, Chastise)
3. **Excisive** (Exclude, Withdraw, Avoid, Keep no company)

In part 1, we established the “Formative” aspect of church discipline; our duty to continually teach the “form” – the doctrine and commands of God found in the scriptures - in meaningful, on-the-ground ways, to those whom the Lord has entrusted to us. In part 2 and part 3, we discussed “Corrective” discipline; our duty to readily – with meekness and fear before God - **give** and **receive** scriptural, spiritual correction, whenever behavior deviates from the form of sound doctrine that we have been taught. Today we will complete our discussion of church discipline by examining “Excisive” discipline.

Every day, each of us is in danger of abandoning the discipline of Jesus Christ, in favor of the wisdom of the world. We must be continually willing to engage in the flesh rending work of discipline: for our own sake, for our brothers’ and sisters’ sake, and for the sake of Christ and His church. That daily submission – that mortifying of our flesh – must be fruitful in each of us, thereby demonstrating the indwelling of the Spirit of God. If we are not exercised with correction – if our heart AND behavior do not change - then we become as a dead stone in the spiritual house; a malignant tumor within the body; a deadly, poisonous root that threatens to spring up and defile those around us.

Hebrews 12:14-29 “14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; 16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. 17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

The discipline of Christ that is to be taught and maintained within the churches is at the heart of the holiness that we are to follow; without it, we have no claim that we are His – we will not see the Lord! The work of discipline is how we are to maintain that holiness, it is the blueprint for HOW to “look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God” –

learning (being taught), showing a good example with our own behavior, teaching, diligently watching, correcting, being corrected, and bearing the fruit of that correction; all by the working of the Holy Spirit in us. Through that work, the Lord will exercise each of us, and will make manifest when a person among us is “failing of the grace of God” – their walk is not consistent with holiness and godliness, either because they have been taken captive by Satan for a season, or because they never had faith in the first place. In such cases, the church **MUST ACT**. Consider the further provocation that Paul gives us:

18 ¶ For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: 20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

Consider how Paul just described the assembly of God in the days of Moses – the dispensation of the Jews. This is a description of a more earthly and visceral dispensation; dark and terrifying; legal and ceremonial; a dispensation of bondage under the Law. The Lord has given us a better thing, beloved! Consider it:

22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. 25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: 26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. 27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29 For our God is a consuming fire.”

What a blessed lot the Lord has given to us worms, by His own pleasure! We are no longer in bondage, but we are at liberty in the Gospel of Jesus Christ! We have been greatly blessed to walk in the light of the beauty, simplicity, and perfection of the Gospel! We have been assembled with those of like faith into this living body, wherein Christ

meets with His people, and speaks His word – we have come, by the grace of God to Mount Sion! Therefore, see that ye refuse not him that speaketh! Can we be assembled in Jesus’ name, while rejecting the discipline that He taught? If the Jews that rejected the Law, and walked after their own law were destroyed, how much more will Christ deal with us, if we boldly refuse the discipline and counsel of Christ that He speaks in the midst of His churches? Christ told Peter that His church is built upon the rock of faith – mutual, proclaimed, and lively within the church. Can we hope to establish some other rock – a figment of our own self-righteous imagination - that will stand the shaking, threshing, purging, and burning that will most assuredly come upon the inhabitants of this earth? NO! We must rely upon Christ, and follow after the discipline that He left us. When we find a person that is walking boldly in sin, contrary to that discipline, we MUST rely upon the precious remedy that Christ left for His churches; we must maintain holiness, by removing that person from the fellowship and communion of the church.

Excisive Discipline

Excision: “The act or procedure of removing by cutting out; surgical removal.”

Let us proceed with an examination of the scriptures that most directly speak to removing someone from the assembly. While we work our way through these passages, please keep the following questions in mind:

- In what cases do we exclude someone? I have broken the passages into 3 categories, based upon the sinful behavior that is being displayed: **Personal Offense**; **Gross Immorality**; **False Doctrine & Contention**. These categories aren’t definitive, and they overlap; but I think it is helpful to consider the fact that these passages are addressing very different types of behavior, and while each ends in the same result, the process can vary in accordance to the situation.
- By what process does the church arrive at the decision to exclude someone?
- What is the spirit with which we exclude someone?
- How are we supposed to behave toward someone that has been excluded?
- What is the purpose of this remedy? Watch for at least these themes: it is done for the highest good of the person being excluded; for the holiness and peace of the church; and for the Glory of Christ.

Personal Offense:

Matthew 18:15-20 “15 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. 16 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. 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 as an heathen man and a publican. 18 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. 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. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

- This passage is fundamental whenever we must soberly consider excluding someone from the church; there are many elements that apply to every situation, however, it is not a catch-all. There are parts of this passage that are specific to the situation that it describes: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee”. This is a matter of personal offense between two members of the church.
 - The scriptures are very clear how we are supposed to love our brothers and sisters in the church – fervently, sincerely, in word AND deed. We are supposed to readily forbear the faults of others, and freely confess our own faults. We are to quickly and fully forgive one another. When all of that fails, and you are offended with someone, then it is REQUIRED of you to go and humbly entreat that person to make the offense right. (1Timothy 5:1,2) You don’t get to be angry and contentious; **“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26, 27)** If you know that there is an offense, STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND ENTREAT ONE ANOTHER UNTIL IT IS RIGHT!!! You cannot give sacrifice to God while you KNOW that there is offense with your brother (**Matthew 5:23,24**). THIS IS NOT OPTIONAL!
 - To be clear, Matthew 18 is not talking about some trifling offense; this is some major, acute thing, or a stubborn, oppressive pattern of behavior that cannot be ignored. In my experience, the fact that the person obstinately justifies themselves, and refuses to heal the offense is an indicator that there is an underlying heart of sinful pride that needs to be addressed. Thank God for giving us watchers and remedies to help us with every aspect of our awful flesh! We don’t have to try to sort it all out; we simply apply the remedies to the facts on the ground, and have great faith that the Lord will show the matter, and deliver us.
 - When a person finds themselves offended in this way, they have the duty to entreat the offender – personally, and without accusing them to others. If both parties are looking at one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, then THIS SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT! If the offender refuses to acknowledge the offense, and put away pride, but rather, continues to offend, then the offended person is instructed to take 2 or 3 with them so that the matter is established.

- The people going to help in this scenario, are going in the spirit of meekness described in Galatians 6:1. This isn't a matter of building a case and establishing sides. They aren't assuming anything, and they recognize that there may be offense on both sides of the equation, and that these loved ones need help from the Lord (like we all do) to overcome the sinful flesh that wars against our spirit. Hearing the hearty counsel of these godly friends SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT to resolve the matter!
 - If the matter is established with faithful witnesses, and there continues to be a proud, impenitent heart, then it is to be faithfully reported to the church. This is not "he-said, she-said". These matters are to be spiritually discerned; such a discussion with the church is to be accompanied with prayer, and great gravity. The church is the ONLY institution that is qualified to hear the case, and they are not bound by human jurisprudence; they are guided by the Word, and Spirit of God.
 - **1Corinthians 2:13-16** "13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural 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."
 - **1Corinthians 6:1-4** "1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? 2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? 4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church."
 - In such a case, the church must first hear the matter – it must be established; **"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."** (Proverbs 18:13)
 - The instruction is to "tell it to the church"; the church must examine the matter to their satisfaction, but there is no particular process required by the scriptures. While it is typically a good thing for the offending person to be present, and to have the opportunity to speak, this instruction does not imply a "trial"; the church is certainly not required to allow the offending person the opportunity to grandstand

and trot out Satanic accusation and confusion. I believe that this passage leaves the church with the authority and latitude to determine the steps that are helpful and needful in each situation.

- If the matter is established, the church speaks to it, with one voice – telling the offending person what is required of them. The offending person has an opportunity to hear the church, and repent – change their behavior, and make it well with their brothers and sisters.
 - The church is now obliged to watch that situation for fruit of a change, to determine whether the Lord has exercised that person, and recovered them from their pride. If there is no such fruit, then the church must remove that person from the body.
- “Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican”:
 - They are to be treated as the people of the world; we have no spiritual kinship or fellowship with them as long as they are outside of the church. Moreover, they are to be carefully avoided, in the same way that the Jews were known to avoid “heathens and publicans”; they had no interaction with them that wasn’t necessary. More on that in the following passages.
 - This judgment of the church is the Lord speaking; He walks among His churches, and He speaks through them. This is binding action, and therefore ought to bring great meekness, fear, and sobriety to the discussion, knowing how each of us is tempted and tried in our own flesh. I don’t think that I grasp the full meaning of verse 18: “whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ... “. It certainly does not mean that the church is determining the fate of men’s souls; that is the work of God alone. We also know that the church can be wrong; when the Lord shows us that fact, then we have a duty to quickly, and fully repair that situation. But, I believe that in this context it includes this meaning: a person cannot live out their days in stark rebellion against the church of Jesus Christ, hoping to make some legalistic argument before the throne of God: “the church told me I had to do x, y, z, and they didn’t have an explicit Bible verse for it”, or “the church was wrong on some particular in my situation”. No! The matter was decided in the Spirit, not according to earthly wisdom; it is bound – there is no further litigation! If you are going to profess Christ, then you have one option: submit yourself to God, repent, and reconcile with the family of faith. Period.
 - “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Again, the Lord is present, and speaking in His churches. Which is at once comforting, and cause for great meekness and care when we put our hand to such matters; we must seek the Lord to give us spiritual discernment – heavenly wisdom, and not man-made logic. Notice also that this is the function and business of the church; no free-agents! Those who forsake the assembly – those who are not “gathered together” – those who refuse to submit themselves to the wonderful,

flesh crushing pattern of the New Testament church, have no claim on Christ, and have no business speaking in His name.

Gross Immorality

These are sins that are willfully committed, in direct opposition to correction and gospel light; sins that are wanton, notorious, and bring shame upon the name of Christ; sins that make our profession and preaching to be hypocritical.

Ephesians 5:3-7 “3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. 7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”

- “Let it not be named once among you”; “Be not ye therefore partakers with them”. Clearly, we are to remove a person from fellowship with the church, if they will not abandon such behavior. To give countenance to such behavior is to endorse it – while naming Christ – and it will only serve to bring wrath on the church.

1Corinthians 5:1-13 “1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 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. 6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 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: 8 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. 9 ¶ I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 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. 11 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. 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.”

- First, notice that the basis for taking action is simply that the matter is “commonly reported”. There is no progression to be followed in this case, like what Matthew 18 describes in the case of a personal offense. The matter is plainly established; that it what is required. It would be ludicrous to suggest that a person who is fornicating must be told by one person to stop fornicating; then if they persist that 2 or 3 others must tell them; then if they keep at it, the church must tell them, etc. God forbid!
 - The concepts behind the Matthew 18 process are always applicable, even where the process itself isn’t:
 - The facts must be credibly established.
 - We should always look to correct a person in the way that is the most helpful to them (given their particular situation), and that is the least exposure necessary to bring about repentance. (**James 5:20**)
- In this particular case, there was a man at the church in Corinth who was proudly fornicating with his stepmother. The people of the church seemed to be puffed up and glorying, with some legalistic argument that excused the behavior (see “vain words” referenced in **Ephesians 5:6**); and / or, they were excusing it with a misplaced notion of mercy. Be clear – if we try to sidestep this remedy of exclusion, and replace it with some manmade, compromising solution, we will find ourselves in great sorrow.
- Paul instructs that they immediately make use of the only appropriate remedy for the situation: “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”. (see also **1Timothy 1:18-20**)
 - In the earth at this hour, there is the church of Jesus Christ (ruled by Christ), and there is the world – everyone else (ruled by Satan). To cast a person out of fellowship with the church is to expose them to the ravages of Satan without the help and care of the church. When a person counts the church, and her prayerful, tearful counsels and entreaties, as light and vain things, they profane the name of Christ. They count Christ as a common thing, and are no longer entitled to that help, unless and until the Lord breaks their heart and brings about true repentance. The church is required to remove her hands from the situation, relying on this remedy with the same faith and diligence wherein we tried to help the person using other means. To do otherwise would be faithless.
 - The goal is for the person’s ultimate good; we desire that the Lord would cause Satan and the world to buffet that person, up to, and including their

death, if it means that their heart of flesh is destroyed, and their spirit is brought to rest sweetly upon Christ alone. We have seen it happen! It is a cause for great rejoicing when the Lord performs that work on a person. We have also seen the opposite. But the fact is, that we won't truly know the effect on some people until we are present with the Lord.

- Notice the diligence instructed, to ensure that this kind of sin is not present in the assembly: “purge out the old leaven”. This is a reference to the careful process whereby the Jews were to search the house and remove anything containing leaven prior to the Passover, so that they didn't accidentally eat it. (**Exodus 12:19**) We are supposed to “look diligently”, not allowing sinful behavior to take root and spread like a cancer through the body.
- Verses 9-11 make clear that there is a certain degree of company that we keep with the people of the world (even though we know that they are fornicators, etc.). For instance, even though we don't have spiritual fellowship with our coworkers, we have friendly relationships, and sometimes eat meals with them. To do otherwise would require us to leave the world altogether. However, those that have made a profession are to be held to a higher standard. If they are excluded from the church, we are to avoid them to the point that we aren't even supposed to be eating with them! In other words, avoid all unnecessary contact with them. We are to do this so that 1) they are ashamed, and 2) they have no ability to defile within the body.
 - Note that this man in Corinth was brought to repentance through this remedy, and as such, was entitled to be rejoined to the body; consider Paul's second letter the church at Corinth:
 - **2Corinthians 2:6-8 “6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. 7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.”**

2Thessalonians 3:6-15 “6 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. 7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; 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: 9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. 10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now them that are such we

command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. 13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. 14 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.”

- Notice the language that Paul is using here – he uses “command” three times in this passage; in other passages he makes a plea - “I beseech you”; he uses a variety of means to impress the importance of this matter of maintaining discipline in the church.
- In this case, the strength of “command” is very instructive to us, because we want to be longsuffering and kind; people who live in the flesh take advantage of that fact, and would suck our very lives dry, turning us aside to pamper and care for their every desire. We can’t work hard enough, or provide enough kindnesses to make up for the laziness and discontentment of a person’s fleshly heart. We command you, in the name of Christ, that you work with quietness and eat your own bread! We will walk along with you, help you, and encourage you in that good path, but we will not allow you to turn aside from it while you are called a member of this church!
- This is a very basic, simple matter: We are each supposed to be improving upon, and employing the skills, gifts, and resources that the Lord has given us, in order to provide for ourselves, our families, the family of faith, and the ministry of the Gospel. Each of us should be using our full capacity for these purposes. To do otherwise is to deny the faith – a hearer of the word, but not a doer. I don’t care what vain words you have to explain why you aren’t working to your capacity, or what stumbling blocks you have put before your feet, the standard is too plain:
 - **1 Timothy 5:8 “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”**
- “Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”: Here again, we see the spirit of excluding someone from the church. It is for their highest good, and with a sincere desire that the Lord will be merciful, and give repentance.
 - While we aren’t going to keep company with them, we certainly aren’t looking to be cruel, or deny them the appropriate help that we owe to any of our neighbors in the world. However, we chiefly owe them three things: admonition, watchfulness, and prayer.
 - Admonition: by keeping no company with them, we maintain a continual admonition. When there are appropriate opportunities, we ought to renew that admonition directly.
 - Watchfulness: we saw with the man in Corinth that he had repented, and yet the people had either not left any appropriate channel of

communication to show that repentance, or they were ignoring the fruit of it. We ought not to leave a penitent person despairing.

- Prayer: **1John 5:14-17** “**14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. 16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.**”

- Here we are plainly instructed to give particular prayer, asking the Lord – according to His will - to recover those professed believers that have fallen in sin. This is an affirmative duty! If we were the one that had fallen, we would desire that kindness to be done for us, knowing that the prayer of a righteous man (and church) is effectual with the Lord – the only one who is able to deliver us.
- While John gives this affirmative instruction, he also keeps us from confusion, with the instruction NOT to pray for those who abandoned the faith, becoming antichrist, thereby sinning unto death.
 - **Hebrews 6:4-6** “**4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, 5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, 6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.**”
 - We’re talking here about people who have turned from their profession, and blasphemed the Holy Ghost by denying Christ. See also **Matthew 12:31**, and **Hebrews 10:26-31**.
- In the midst of this instruction, Paul kindly considers and encourages us to the work: “but ye brethren, be not weary in well doing.” Paul is well aware that this work can be exhausting, conscience piercing, and endlessly contentious. We cannot allow the pain of the process with one person to discourage us from patiently, scripturally helping the next person. The Lord instructs us in the midst of this labor: “**But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.**” (James 1:4)

False Doctrine / Contention

1 Timothy 6:3-5 “**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.**”

- It is intolerable to have someone bringing false doctrine, and contentious behavior into the body. If they refuse to consent to wholesome words, then the church is obliged to withdraw from that person.

Romans 16:17-18 “**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.**”

- *Matthew Henry: “Those who burden the church with dividing and offending impositions, who uphold and enforce those impositions, who introduce and propagate dividing and offending notions, who out of pride, ambition, affectation of novelty, or the like, causelessly separate from their brethren, and by perverse disputes, censures, and evil surmisings, alienate the affections of Christians one from another — these cause divisions and offences, contrary to, or different from, the doctrine which we have learned. Whatever varies from the form of sound doctrine which we have in the scriptures opens a door to divisions and offences. If truth be once deserted, unity and peace will not last long. Now, mark those that thus cause divisions. Observe them, the method they take, the end they drive at. There is need of a piercing watchful eye to discern the danger we are in from such people; for commonly the pretences are plausible, when the projects are very pernicious. Do not look only at the divisions and offences, but run up those streams to the fountain, and mark those that cause them, and especially that thing in them which causes these divisions and offences, those lusts on each side whence come these wars and fightings.”*
- “Avoid them”: This is a proactive avoidance; the word here is also translated as “eschew”, and “go out of the way”.
 - Gramps used to reference the idea of mariners avoiding the rocky shoals – when you realize that the boat is headed toward the rocks, it’s all hands on deck! Turn the boat!

- *Trapp: "Set a watchful and a jealous eye upon them, as upon pests and enemies. And here, let your overseers be not byseers, but look well to the flock, lest these wolves worry them. Avoid them: decline them studiously, as ye would do a serpent in your way, or poison in your food."*

Titus 3:8-11 "8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. 9 ¶ But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. 10 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."

- "Affirm constantly"; "be careful to maintain good works": This is endless work, that is tiring to the flesh. Engage in the bloody war within yourself; consider and provoke others; fight through your hesitance to humbly provoke, and the fleshly defenses of others, which mightily resist provocation. This is work that requires us to look to the Lord continually for renewed strength, and a diligent, faithful spirit. Weariness and past experiences make us hesitant; frustration makes us hard; fatigue makes us cowardly. "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing"!
- "Foolish questions": throwing around questions and theories, rather than expounding, and executing upon sound and certain doctrine. It is true that we are supposed to carefully search out the scriptures, but to what end? That we might understand what is required of us, and then get zealously about the business of doing that! This is not an academic, beard stroking exercise. Foolish questions are the stock and trade of the Universities of this world – endless questions; a parade of really smart fools crafting worthless words, so that they can beat the air with their lips! They appear to be wise to the world, but they are fools, because they contribute NOTHING to godliness!
- "Contentions": "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." (**1Corinthians 11:16**) Contention is not how we should behave in the church – when we lack light on a question, we patiently seek God for wisdom; when he gives us understanding on a matter, then we proceed – walking according to one rule - with the unity of the Spirit.
- "An heretic reject" – the English word "heretic" only appears one time in the Bible. The Greek word is "hairesikos"; Strong's defines it as "schismatic, factious". It is derived from a word that means "to belong to a sect". "Heresies" is listed as one of the works of the flesh in **Galatians 5**. We're talking about a person who brings contention and division to the body, for the sake of their own pride. They are like a deadly viper that is to be studiously avoided.

- Calvin: *“There will be no end of quarrels and dispute, if we wish to conquer obstinate men by argument; for they will never want words, and they will derive fresh courage from impudence, so that they will never grow weary of fighting. Thus, Paul forbids Titus to waste much time in debating with heretics, because battle would lead to battle and dispute to dispute. Such is the cunning of Satan, that, by the impudent talkativeness of such men, he entangles good and faithful pastors, so as to draw them away from diligence in teaching. We must therefore beware lest we become engaged in quarrelsome disputes; for we shall never have leisure to devote our labors to the Lord’s flock, and contentious men will never cease to annoy us. This is a highly necessary admonition; for even they who would willingly take no part in strifes of words are sometimes drawn by shame into controversy, because they think that it would be shameful cowardice to quit the field. Besides, there is no temper, however mild, that is not liable to be provoked by the fierce taunts of enemies, because they look upon it as intolerable that those men should attack the truth, without receiving a reply. But we must exercise moderation, so as not instantly to declare every man to be a “heretic” who does not agree with our opinion. There are some matters on which Christians may differ from each other, without being divided into sects. Paul himself commands that they shall not be so divided, when he bids them keep their harmony unbroken, and wait for the revelation of God. (#Php 3:16). But whenever the obstinacy of any person grows to such an extent, that, led by selfish motives, he either separates from the body, or draws away some of the flock, or interrupts the course of sound doctrine, in such a case we must boldly resist.”*

This is deep water, my friends. We’ve certainly experienced many things, with many people, in all of the categories that we just discussed. It makes my head spin to even think back through some of those experiences. Should we be disheartened because the Lord has sent these things our way? God forbid! Consider the scripture:

1Corinthians 11:18,19 “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.”

There MUST BE heresies – and heretics – sneaking worldly wisdom in the door. It is our blessed duty and privilege to watch, and prove all things - prayerfully and faithfully applying the scriptures to each situation. It is through these experiences that we are brought to understand the WORTHLESSNESS of our own wisdom and strength, and to rely fully on Jesus Christ and His word. It is through these experiences that God prepares His people to be useful to one another (**Hebrews 5:14**); it is through these fiery trials

that we are proved; it is through these afflictions and chastenings that we are made manifest as the sons of God.

And now we've come full circle to where we started 8 months ago: Maintaining the discipline of Jesus Christ is the very purpose for which the church exists; learning, doing, and teaching the form of sound doctrine is the work of our lives. If we will not maintain that holiness, then Christ will come quickly and remove the candlestick from this place. The world despises the discipline of Christ, and wants to make us ashamed and afraid to maintain it; this is particularly true of those antichrists who go out from among us.

Mark 8:38 "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Beloved friends - let us not be weary in well doing.

I love you all. Amen.