

## Does the Bible instruct the church to discipline Christians who are not faithful in their attendance?

Church discipline is essential to congregational health and welfare. Sometimes brethren will make excuses as to why the disorderly should not be disciplined. God will not be mocked in this matter any more than he will be mocked in any other matter. Congregational sowing will result in congregational reaping; therefore, it is essential that the Lord's will toward the unfaithful in attendance be understood and followed by his church. Is the concept that the unfaithful in attendance have withdrawn from the church, so the church is not in the position to withdraw from the unfaithful in attendance Bible truth? Or is it the case that the Bible requires the faithful to discipline those who are unfaithful in attendance?

Notice Hebrews 10:25: ***“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*** The participle translated “forsaking” (forsake, abandon, desert) is expressing the customary present, which is a habitual practice. The concept is much deeper than just missing services for an unauthorized reason. While lazy attendance is sin, it is not the sin of

desertion as denoted in Hebrews 10:25. During these early stages of lazy attendance, the faithful would be wise to encourage and admonish these weak brethren. Longsuffering and patience are important and necessary ingredients to instructive discipline. But what happens when the instructive phase of discipline fails to turn the sinner back to the right way of the Lord? He further digresses and finally abandons church assembling as a habitual practice. What does the Bible require at this juncture?

First of all it must be understood that all practicing sinners, by their own actions, sever their fellowship with the Lord. The context of Isaiah 59:2 is that of an habitual, longstanding practice. Here the Lord said through his prophet, “your iniquities have separated between you and your God.” According to 1 Peter 3:12 the same truth applies in the Christian dispensation: “For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil.” To demonstrate that fellowship is vertical with the Lord, and then horizontal with the faithful in Christ notice 1 John 1:3: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Accordingly, those to whom the Bible doctrine of being withdrawn from applies have already dislodged themselves from the refuge of the Lord's fellowship. Therefore, certain aspects of fellowship between Christians and

erring brethren are severed prior to the formal withdrawal. Christians and erring brethren do not participate in the same spiritual deeds, resulting in the same spiritual blessings. Prior to the actual withdrawal, fellowship in the faith has ceased. Christians and erring brethren simply do not enjoy the same close relationship enjoyed between Christ and his faithful ones. By withdrawing from the disorderly Christians announce their agreement with God in the matter of fellowship.

The apostle said, “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.” Every member of the Lord's church is to “withdraw” from the Christian walking disorderly. The word translated “withdraw” in this context means, to “keep away, stand aloof . . . from someone.” (BAGD, 766.) Since the spiritual side of fellowship has been severed, Christians are to hold themselves aloof from the erring brother, which is the final step in severing the union or fellowship once enjoyed.

Secondly, “withdrawing” is not an assembly only command, as would be necessary if the idea that those who have stopped coming to church assemblies are not to be withdrawn from, were Bible truth. Withdrawing extends beyond the assembly into daily life. Brethren do and should see each other at times other than church

assemblies. According to God's word Christians are to admonish the disorderly as brethren (2 Thess. 3:15). When the aloofness of the withdrawal is observed in love, erring brethren are admonished. Simple examination of the scope of Biblical fellowship exposes the concept that the deserter left the church, thereby relieving her of the obligation to withdraw from the disorderly, as an anti-Biblical concept.

Finally, consider these questions. Is the habitual violation of the doctrine of Christ a disorderly walk, which is not after the tradition of the doctrine of Christ? Is it a violation of the doctrine of Christ to abandon church assembling? If the answer to these questions is yes, and it is, then the Lord commands the church to withdraw from those who have deserted church assembling.

One will certainly ask, "what good will it do to withdraw from those who abandon church assembling?" "The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are* revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). From what is revealed it is clear that obedience in this matter is a demonstration of love for Christ and the erring (John 14:15; 2 Thess. 3:15). Withdrawing from those who abandon church assembling helps keep the church pure (1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9). God knows what he is doing; the Christian is simply to obey. The Bible says, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

A study by Darrell Broking

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Instruct The  
Church To  
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