

DO NOT BE PARTAKERS

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Text: Eph. 5:7

Introduction:

- I. **Sin is so terrible that the Bible teaches that the line between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error, etc. must be clearly drawn**
 - A. Psa. 97:10: ¹⁰ You who **love** the LORD, **hate evil**! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.
 - B. Pr. 8:13: ¹³ The fear of the LORD is to **hate evil**; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.
 - C. Amos 5:14-15: ¹⁴ **Seek good** and **not evil**, That you may live; So the LORD God of hosts will be with you, As you have spoken. ¹⁵ **Hate evil, love good**; Establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.
 - D. Rom. 12:9-10: ⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. **Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.** ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;
 - E. This is **not always easy** to do
- II. **The Bible repeatedly warns against being partakers in other men's sins**
 - A. Eph. 5:3-7: ³ But **fornication** and all **uncleanness** or **covetousness**, let it not even be **named** among you, as is **fitting** for saints; ⁴ neither **filthiness**, nor **foolish talking**, nor **coarse jesting**, which are not **fitting**, but rather **giving of thanks**. ⁵ For this you know, that no **fornicator**, **unclean person**, nor **covetous man**, who is an **idolater**, has **any inheritance** in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one **deceive** you with **empty words**, for because of these things the **wrath of God** comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore **do not be partakers with** [*symmetochos*] **them**.
 - B. Eph. 5:8-11: ⁸ For you were once **darkness**, but now you are **light** in the Lord. **Walk as children of light** ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all **goodness**, **righteousness**, and **truth**), ¹⁰ finding out what is **acceptable** to the Lord. ¹¹ And have **no fellowship** [*synkoinoneo*] with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose** them.
 - C. 1 Tim. 5:22: ²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor **share** [*koinoneo*] **in other people's sins**; keep yourself pure.

1. In this context, Paul is instructing the young evangelist Timothy about how he is to **treat elders**

- a. Elders who rule well should be counted worthy of **double honor** (1 Tim. 5:17-18)
- b. Don't receive an **accusation** against an elder that is not supported by two or three **witnesses** (1 Tim. 5:19)
- c. **Rebuke** elders who sin before all (1 Tim. 5:20)
- d. Observe these things without **partiality** (1 Tim. 5:21)
- e. Do not **lay hands** on [ordain] anyone hastily (1 Tim. 5:22)
- f. Do not **share** in other's sins (1 Tim. 5:22)

D. 1 Cor. 10:14-22: ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry**. ¹⁵ I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The **cup of blessing** which we bless, is it not the **communion** [*koinonia*] of the **blood of Christ**? The **bread** which we break, is it not the **communion** [*koinonia*] of the **body of Christ**? ¹⁷ For we, though many, are **one bread** and **one body**; for we all **partake** [*metecho*] of that **one bread**. ¹⁸ Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices **partakers** [*koinonos*] of the altar? ¹⁹ What am I saying then? That **an idol is anything**, or **what is offered to idols is anything**? ²⁰ Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they **sacrifice to demons** and not to God, and I do not want you to have **fellowship** [*koinonos*] **with demons**. ²¹ You cannot drink the **cup of the Lord** and the **cup of demons**; you cannot partake [*metecho*] of the **Lord's table** and of the **table of demons**. ²² Or **do we provoke the Lord to jealousy**? Are we stronger than He?

E. 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1: ¹⁴ **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers**. For what **fellowship** [*metoche*] has righteousness with lawlessness? And what **communion** [*koinonia*] has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what **accord** [*symphonesis*] has Christ with Belial? Or what **part** [*meris*] has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what **agreement** [*synkatathesis*] has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will **dwell** in them And **walk** among them. I will be their **God**, And they shall be **My people**." ¹⁷ Therefore "**Come out from among them And be separate**, says the Lord. **Do not touch** what is unclean, And I will **receive** you." ¹⁸ "I will be a **Father** to you, And you shall be **My sons and daughters**, Says the LORD Almighty." ¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness** of the flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness** in the **fear of God**.

F. 2 Jn. 9-11: ⁹ Whoever **transgresses** and does not **abide** in the **doctrine of Christ** does not **have God**. He who **abides** in the **doctrine of Christ** has both the **Father** and the **Son**. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this doctrine**, do not **receive** him into your house nor **greet** him; ¹¹ for he who **greet**s him **shares** [*koinoneo*] in his evil deeds.

G. Rev. 18:4: ⁴ And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “**Come out** of her, my people, lest you **share in** [*synkononeo*] her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

III. We recognize and God recognizes that a man can be a partaker in something although he does not actually perform the deed

A. The man who “**takes out a contract**” on a Mafia boss is just as guilty as the man who **pulls the trigger**

B. When David went out to battle, **the weary who stayed behind** had a right to the **spoils** as well

1. 1 Sam. 30:21-25: ²¹ Now David came to the **two hundred men** who had been so weary that they could not follow David, whom they also had made to stay at the Brook Besor. So they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near the people, he **greeted** them. ²² Then all the **wicked and worthless men** of those who went with David answered and said, “**Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except for every man’s wife and children, that they may lead them away and depart.**” ²³ But David said, “**My brethren, you shall not do so with what the LORD has given us**, who has preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us. ²⁴ For who will heed you in this matter? **But as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike.**” ²⁵ So it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.

C. Although **David** did not personally kill Uriah with his own hands, he was responsible for his death and guilty of murder

1. 2 Sam. 11:14-17: ¹⁴ In the morning it happened that David wrote **a letter** to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵ And he wrote in the letter, saying, “**Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die.**” ¹⁶ So it was, while Joab besieged the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there were valiant men. ¹⁷ Then the men of the city came out and fought with Joab. And some of the people of the servants of David fell; and **Uriah the Hittite died also**.

2. 2 Sam. 12:9: ⁹ Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? **You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword**; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have **killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon**.

IV. **We cannot please God and be an “accessory to sin” before, during, or after the fact**

- A. In a bank robbery, the get-away driver who **“keeps the motor running”** is just as guilty as the man who **puts the money in the bag**

V. **So, God’s word clearly and repeatedly teaches that we cannot be partakers in others’ sins, but that should raise the question: “How can I be a partaker in someone else’s sin?”**

- A. Note: This is not to say that we are **guilty of another person’s sins** (Ezek. 18:1-20)

1. **Righteous father** (Ezek. 18:5-9)

2. **Wicked son** (Ezek. 18:10-13)

3. **Righteous grandson** (Ezek. 18:14-18)

4. Ezek. 18:19-20: ¹⁹ Yet you say, ‘**Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?**’ Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. ²⁰ “**The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son.** The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

- B. Thus, the Bible teaches here and elsewhere that we are not held **guilty of another man’s sins**

- C. However, the Bible also teaches that we can **partake in another person’s sins** in many different ways

Body:

I. **We Can Partake In Another’s Sins**

A. **By Committing The Same Sin Together**

1. The wise man warned his son of falling in with **the wrong crowd** and becoming guilty of sin

- a. Pr. 1:10-19: ¹⁰ My son, if sinners **entice** you, **Do not consent**. ¹¹ If they say, “**Come with us**, Let us **lie in wait** to shed blood; Let us **lurk secretly** for the innocent without cause; ¹² Let us **swallow them alive** like Sheol, And whole, like those who go down to the Pit; ¹³ We shall find all kinds of **precious possessions**, We shall fill our houses with **spoil**; ¹⁴ **Cast in your lot among us**, Let us all have **one purse**”— ¹⁵ My son, **do not walk in the way with them**, **Keep your foot from their path**; ¹⁶ For their **feet run to evil**, And they make haste to **shed blood**. ¹⁷ Surely, in vain **the net** is spread In the sight of any bird; ¹⁸ But they **lie in wait** for their own blood, They **lurk secretly** for their own lives. ¹⁹ So are the ways of everyone who is **greedy for gain**; It takes away the **life** of its owners.
2. There are many **Bible examples** where people became partakers of sin by **committing sin together**
 - a. **Adam and Eve** (Gen. 3:1ff)
 - 1) Gen. 3:6: ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was **good for food**, that it was **pleasant to the eyes**, and a tree **desirable to make one wise**, she took of its fruit and **ate**. She also gave to her husband with her, and he **ate**.
 - b. **Joseph’s brothers** (Gen. 37:18ff)
 - 1) They conspired at first to **kill** Joseph (Gen. 37:18-20)
 - 2) They cast Joseph into a **pit** (Gen. 37:23-24)
 - 3) They sold Joseph to some **Midianite traders** (Gen. 37:25-28)
 - 4) They used Joseph’s coat of many colors, dipped in the blood of a kid, to **deceive Jacob** (Gen. 37:31-35)
 - c. **Ananias and Sapphira** (Acts 5:1ff)
 - 1) Acts 5:2: ² And he **kept back part of the proceeds**, his wife also being **aware** of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet.
 - 2) Acts 5:9: ⁹ Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have **agreed together** to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”
 - d. *Etc.*
3. These people shared with each other in sin by virtue of **committing the same sin together**

B. By Committing The Same Sin Separately

1. The **kings** of ancient Israel and the **nation** itself became partakers in **the sins of Jeroboam** by committing the same sins that Jeroboam had committed
 - a. **Nadab** followed the way of Jeroboam (1 Ki. 15:25-26, 30)
 - b. **Baasha** walked in the way of Jeroboam (1 Ki. 15:33-34; 16:1-2)
 - c. **Zimri** walked in the way of Jeroboam (1 Ki. 16:15, 19)
 - d. **Omri** walked in the way of Jeroboam (1 Ki. 16:25-26)
 - e. **Ahab** walked in the way of Jeroboam (1 Ki. 16:29-31)
 - f. **Ahaziah** walked in the way of Jeroboam (1 Ki. 22:51-52)
 - g. **Jehoram** persisted in the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 3:1-3)
 - h. **Jehu** did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 10:29-31)
 - i. **Jehoahaz** followed the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 13:1-2, 6)
 - j. **Jehoash** did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 13:10-11)
 - k. **Jeroboam II** did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 14:23-24)
 - l. **Zechariah** did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 15:8-9)
 - m. **Menahem** did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 15:17-18)
 - n. **Pekahiah** did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 15:23-24)
 - o. **Pekah** did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (2 Ki. 15:27-28)
 - 1) Note: All the kings of Israel were wicked, and statements like these are made about all of Israel's kings except **Elah, Tibni, Shallum, and Hoshea**
 - p. **The children of Israel** walked in all the sins of Jeroboam
 - 1) 2 Ki. 17:21-23: ²¹ For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then **Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin.** ²² For **the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam** which he did; **they did not depart from them,** ²³ until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.

2. Jesus accused **the Jews** of His day of being partakers in **the sins of their fathers**, because they **committed the same sins**

- a. Mt. 23:29-36: ²⁹ “**Woe** to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you **build the tombs** of the prophets and **adorn the monuments** of the righteous, ³⁰ and say, ‘**If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.**’
³¹ “Therefore you are **witnesses** against yourselves that you are **sons** of those who murdered the prophets. ³² **Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt.** ³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! **How can you escape the condemnation of hell?** ³⁴ Therefore, indeed, I send you **prophets, wise men**, and **scribes**: some of them you will **kill** and **crucify**, and some of them you will **scourge** in your synagogues and **persecute** from city to city, ³⁵ that on you may come **all the righteous blood** shed on the earth, from the **blood of righteous Abel** to the **blood of Zechariah**, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ Assuredly, I say to you, **all these things will come upon this generation.**
- b. Jesus’ point was that even though these Jews claimed that they were **not in fellowship** with their ancestors, in fact **they were**
- c. By **killing the Messiah**, they committed **the same sin** their ancestors had committed by **killing the prophets** of old

3. Stephen accused **the Jews** who stoned him to death of being partakers in **the sins of their fathers**, because they **committed the same sins**

- a. Acts 7:51-53: ⁵¹ “You **stiff-necked** and **uncircumcised** in heart and ears! You always **resist the Holy Spirit**; as your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the **prophets** did your fathers not **persecute**? And they **killed** those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the **betrayers** and **murderers**, ⁵³ who have **received** the law by the direction of angels and have **not kept it.**”

4. We can do the same thing today by **sharing with sinners of another time or place**

C. By **Consenting With Those Who Sin**

- 1. Although we may not actually **commit the sin ourselves**, we become a partaker in the sin by **endorsing or supporting those who do**
 - a. Psa. 50:18: ¹⁸ When you saw a thief, you **consented** with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers.

b. Saul of Tarsus

- 1) Acts 7:57-8:1: ⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast him out of the city and **stoned** him. And the **witnesses** laid down their **clothes** at the feet of a young man named **Saul**. ⁵⁹ And they **stoned Stephen** as he was calling on God and saying, “**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**” ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “**Lord, do not charge them with this sin.**” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. ¹ Now **Saul was consenting to his death**. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
- 2) Acts 22:19-20: ¹⁹ So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I **imprisoned** and **beat** those who believe on You. ²⁰ And **when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death**, and **guarding the clothes** of those who were killing him.’
 - a) Paul’s main point in his effort to persuade Jesus to let him stay in Jerusalem was that by **consenting** to the death of Stephen, he was **a partner** in their sin
 - b) Paul thought that the Jews’ realization of that fact would make his efforts among them **more fruitful**

c. Joab

- 1) 2 Sam. 11:14-25: ¹⁴ In the morning it happened that David wrote a **letter to Joab** and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵ And he wrote in the letter, saying, “**Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die.**” ¹⁶ So it was, while Joab besieged the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there were valiant men. ¹⁷ Then the men of the city came out and fought with Joab. And some of the people of the servants of David fell; and **Uriah the Hittite died also**. ¹⁸ Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war, ¹⁹ and charged the messenger, saying, “When you have finished telling the matters of the war to the king, ²⁰ if it happens that the king’s wrath rises, and he says to you: ‘Why did you approach so near to the city when you fought? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall?’ ²¹ Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go near the wall?’—then you shall say, ‘**Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead**’

also.’ ” ²² So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent by him. ²³ And the messenger said to David, “Surely the men prevailed against us and came out to us in the field; then we drove them back as far as the entrance of the gate. ²⁴ The archers shot from the wall at your servants; and some of the king’s servants are dead, and **your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.**” ²⁵ Then David said to the messenger, “Thus you shall say to Joab: **‘Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another. Strengthen your attack against the city, and overthrow it.’** So encourage him.”

2. Modern day examples:

- a. Laughing at **dirty jokes**
- b. Going to the **“parties”**
- c. Going to **the prom**
- d. **Listening** to the gossip
- e. Etc.

3. When Paul indicted **the Gentile world** of sin, he also condemned those who would **condone their wicked ways**

- a. Rom. 1:32: ³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who **practice** such things are **deserving of death**, not only do the same but also **approve** of those who practice them.

4. *Sam Dawson*: “These passages contain important teaching for those who are concerned about fellowship in a congregation where unscriptural things are done, activities they don’t believe in themselves. ***These passages teach we don’t have to personally believe the unscriptural thing to be wrong and we don’t even have to practice it ourselves. Giving consent to something that is wrong is enough for us to be in fellowship with other men’s sins! We encourage its practice by financially supporting it or just merely consenting to its being done.***” (Bold emphasis added, *Fellowship With God And His People*, 1988, 84)

D. By Failing To Reprove And Rebuke Sin

- 1. We can be a partaker in other’s sins if we know of sin, but **remain silent** -- we fail to act, reprove, rebuke, expose, etc.
 - a. Eph. 5:3-14: ³ But **fornication** and all **uncleanness** or **covetousness**, let it not even be **named** among you, as is **fitting** for saints; ⁴ neither **filthiness**, nor **foolish talking**, nor **coarse jesting**, which are not fitting, but rather **giving of thanks**. ⁵ For this you know, that no **fornicator**, **unclean person**,

nor **covetous man**, who is an **idolater**, has **any inheritance** in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one **deceive** you with empty words, for because of these things the **wrath of God** comes upon the **sons of disobedience**. ⁷ Therefore **do not be partakers** with them. ⁸ For you were once **darkness**, but now you are **light** in the Lord. **Walk as children of light** ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹ And **have no fellowship** with the **unfruitful works of darkness**, but rather **expose** them. ¹² For it is **shameful** even to **speak** of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are **exposed** are made **manifest** by the **light**, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴ Therefore He says: **“Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”**

- b. *Edmund Burke*: “The only thing necessary for the **triumph of evil** is for good men to **do nothing**.” (Bold emphasis added, *Letter to William Smith*, Jan. 9, 1795)

2. Bible examples:

a. **Aaron** (Ex. 32:1-6, 21-26)

- 1) Ex. 32:25: ²⁵ Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for **Aaron had not restrained them**, to their shame among their enemies),

b. **Eli**

- 1) Eli’s sons were **extremely wicked men** (1 Sam. 2:13-17, 22)

- 2) Eli did not **remain silent**, he **rebuked** his sons

- a) 1 Sam. 2:22-25: ²² Now Eli was **very old**; and he **heard** everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they **lay with the women** who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ²³ So he said to them, **“Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. ²⁴ No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the LORD’s people transgress. ²⁵ If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?”** Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them.

- 3) But he did not **do enough**, and the Lord brought **judgment** on his house

- a) 1 Sam. 3:11-14: ¹¹ Then the LORD said to Samuel: **“Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² In that day I will perform against Eli all that**

I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because **his sons made themselves vile**, and **he did not restrain them**. ¹⁴ And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”

c. **Pilate**

- 1) Mt. 27:18: ¹⁸ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of **envy**.
- 2) Mt. 27:24-26: ²⁴ When Pilate saw that **he could not prevail at all**, but rather that a **tumult** was rising, he took **water** and **washed his hands** before the multitude, saying, “**I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.**” ²⁵ And all the people answered and said, “**His blood be on us and on our children.**” ²⁶ Then he **released Barabbas** to them; and when he had **scourged** Jesus, he delivered Him to be **crucified**.

d. **The church at Corinth**

- 1) 1 Cor. 5:1-5: ¹ It is actually reported that there is **sexual immorality** among you, and such sexual immorality as is **not even named among the Gentiles**—that a man has his father's wife! ² And you are **puffed up**, and have not rather **mourned**, that he who has done this deed might be **taken away** from among you. ³ For I indeed, as **absent in body** but **present in spirit**, have already **judged** (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are **gathered together**, along with my spirit, with **the power** of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ **deliver such a one to Satan** for the **destruction of the flesh**, that **his spirit may be saved** in the day of the Lord Jesus.

e. *Etc.*

3. This may be the **most common way** in which Christians become partakers in other men's sins

a. **Preachers** refusing to preach on some subjects

- 1) Drinking
- 2) Dancing
- 3) Immodesty
- 4) Smoking

- 5) MDR
- 6) Masonry
- 7) *Etc.*
- b. **Churches** refusing to publicly mark the disorderly
- c. **Members** refusing to withdraw themselves from the disorderly
- d. **Silence** on the issues of abortion, euthanasia, pornography, television programming, etc.
- e. We see a brother sin and **say nothing**
- f. A Christian leaves the faith and we “**chat it up**” with him as if nothing has happened
- 4. We must **speak out against sin**
 - a. We are **watchmen**, and we will be held responsible for “**sounding the trumpet**”
 - 1) Ezek. 3:16-21: ¹⁶ Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ¹⁷ “Son of man, I have made you a **watchman** for the house of Israel; therefore **hear a word** from My mouth, and **give them warning** from Me: ¹⁸ When I say to the wicked, ‘**You shall surely die,**’ and **you give him no warning**, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, **that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity**; but **his blood I will require at your hand**. ¹⁹ Yet, if you **warn the wicked**, and he **does not turn from his wickedness**, nor from his wicked way, **he shall die in his iniquity**; but **you have delivered your soul**. ²⁰ “Again, when a **righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity**, and I lay a stumbling block before him, **he shall die**; because **you did not give him warning**, **he shall die in his sin**, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but **his blood I will require at your hand**. ²¹ Nevertheless if you **warn the righteous man** that **the righteous should not sin**, and **he does not sin**, **he shall surely live** because **he took warning**; also you will have **delivered your soul**.”
 - 2) Ezek. 33:1-9: ¹ Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ² “Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: ‘When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their **watchman**, ³ when he **sees the sword coming** upon the land, if he **blows the trumpet and warns**

the people,⁴ then whoever **hears the sound of the trumpet** and **does not take warning**, if the sword comes and **takes him away**, **his blood shall be on his own head**.⁵ He **heard the sound of the trumpet**, but **did not take warning**; **his blood shall be upon himself**. But he who **takes warning will save his life**.⁶ But if the watchman **sees the sword coming** and **does not blow the trumpet**, and **the people are not warned**, and **the sword comes and takes any person from among them**, he is **taken away in his iniquity**; but **his blood I will require at the watchman's hand**.⁷ ⁷ “So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall **hear a word** from My mouth and **warn them for Me**.⁸ When I say to the wicked, ‘**O wicked man, you shall surely die!**’ and you **do not speak to warn the wicked from his way**, that wicked man shall **die in his iniquity**; but **his blood I will require at your hand**.⁹ Nevertheless if you **warn the wicked to turn from his way**, and he **does not turn from his way**, he shall **die in his iniquity**; but you have **delivered your soul**.

b. We need to develop the attitude of **Jeremiah**

- 1) Jer. 20:7-9: ⁷ O LORD, You **induced me**, and I was **persuaded**; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. **I am in derision daily**; Everyone **mocks me**.⁸ For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, **“Violence and plunder!”** Because the word of the LORD was made to me A **reproach** and a **derision daily**.⁹ Then I said, **“I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.”** But His word was in my heart like a **burning fire** Shut up in my bones; **I was weary of holding it back**, And **I could not**.
- 2) The OT prophets refused to speak **“smooth things”** (Isa. 30:10) when hard things needed to be said, and they refused to preach **“Peace, peace”** when there was no peace (Jer. 6:14; 8:11)
- 3) They didn’t just preach **encouraging words** to the **faithful remnant** and **leave the indifferent majority alone**

c. We need the attitude of **Jesus** who “called a spade a spade”

- 1) Jesus didn’t leave the **Pharisees** alone; in fact, He repeatedly **“poked them in the eye”**

2) Jesus repeatedly provoked **Sabbath controversies**

Sabbath Controversies	Mt.	Mk.	Lk.	Jn.
Casting out Demon		1:21-28	4:31-37	
Peter's Mother-In-Law	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Lame Man				5:1-9
Plucking Grain	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Man With Withered Hand	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Woman With Spirit Of Infirmary			13:10-17	
Man Born Blind				9:1-9
Man With Dropsy			14:1-6	

a) On one occasion, the ruler of the synagogue urged people to come and be **healed** on any of the other six days of the week, but not on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:14)

b) And Jesus certainly could have **healed on other days**, but He **repeatedly healed on the Sabbath**

3) Although Jesus was **patient** with a Pharisee like **Nicodemus** in the beginning of His Public Ministry, He eventually **rebuked** the Pharisees in no uncertain terms (Mt. 15:7; 16:3; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; Lk. 11:38-44)

4) *John MacArthur, Jr.*: “The Lord Jesus Christ never **watered down** His message to **avoid offending people**; He made them either **feel bad enough to repent**, or **furious enough to reject**.” (Bold emphasis added, “Luke,” MTNC, 224)

d. We need the attitude of **Paul**

1) Acts 20:18-21: ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ **serving** the Lord with all **humility**, with **many tears and trials** which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how **I kept back nothing that was helpful**, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, **repentance** toward God and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

2) Acts 20:26-27: ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that **I am innocent of the blood of all men**. ²⁷ For I have **not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God**.

- a. Are we resisting the temptation to **whitewash** and **mollycoddle** – to **look the other way**, because we're just **sick and tired of the hassle**?
 - a. Are we tempted to preach words of **comfort** and **encouragement** to the **willing** and basically **leave the unwilling alone**, because after all it doesn't really seem to **do much good**?
 - 1) If so, let me remind you that Ezekiel did not just **preach positive sermons to the faithful remnant** and **leave the hard-hearted majority alone** (Ezek. 2:3-7). He **warned** both the wicked and the righteous (Ezek. 3:18-21).
 - e. *Sam Dawson*: "When one **knows** the truth and **fails to apply it** where he can, he becomes **partaker** in the very sins he should restrain." (Bold emphasis added, *Fellowship With God And His People*, 1988, 85)
 - f. *Martin Luther*: "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am **not confessing Christ**, however boldly I may be **professing Christ**. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point." (Bold emphasis added, quoted in John MacArthur, *Expository Preaching*, 98)
 - g. Christians who **look the other way** become partakers in other's sins
5. Having said all of that, I am **not saying** that:
- a. Every problem and/or sin must be **dealt with publicly**
 - 1) We should try to deal with things **privately** if we can
 - a) Mt. 18:15-17: ¹⁵ "Moreover if your brother **sins** against you, **go** and **tell** him his fault between you and him **alone**. If he **hears** you, you have **gained** your brother. ¹⁶ But if he **will not hear**, take with you **one or two more**, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' ¹⁷ And if he **refuses to hear them**, tell it to the **church**. But if he **refuses even to hear the church**, let him be to you like a **heathen** and a **tax collector**.
 - b. Every problem must be **dealt with immediately**
 - 1) In 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed **many problems** and answered **many questions**
 - 2) But he **didn't deal with everything** that needed to be dealt with in that letter

- a) 1 Cor. 11:34: ³⁴ But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And **the rest I will set in order when I come.**

c. We must preach **only against sin**

- 1) We need to be as **positive** as we can be and as **negative** as we have to be

- 2) We need to strive to be **balanced** in our preaching

- a) 1 Th. 5:14: ¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn** those who are unruly, **comfort** the fainthearted, **uphold** the weak, **be patient** with all.

- b) 2 Tim. 4:1-4: ¹ I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **judge** the living and the dead at His **appearing** and **His kingdom**: ² **Preach** the word! **Be ready** in season *and* out of season. **Convince, rebuke, exhort**, with all **longsuffering** and **teaching**. ³ For the time will come when they will **not endure sound doctrine**, but according to their own **desires**, *because* they have **itching ears**, they will heap up for themselves **teachers**; ⁴ and they will **turn *their* ears away** from the truth, and be **turned aside** to fables.

- 3) We must preach the **whole counsel of God** and hold back nothing that is **needed**

- a) Acts 20:18-21: ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all **humility**, with many **tears** and **trials** which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how **I kept back nothing that was helpful**, but **proclaimed** it to you, and taught you **publicly** and from **house to house**, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, **repentance** toward God and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

- b) Acts 20:26-27: ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* **innocent** of the **blood** of all *men*. ²⁷ For I have **not shunned** to declare to you the **whole counsel** of God.

- 4) In a nutshell, we must **address the needs** of our people

E. By Influencing Others To Sin By **Our Example**

1. Our **bad example** may cause others to **stumble**

- a. Mt. 18:5-7: ⁵ Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. ⁶ “Whoever **causes** one of these little ones who believe in Me to **sin**, it would be better for him if a **millstone** were hung around his neck, and he were **drowned in the depth of the sea**. ⁷ Woe to the world because of **offenses**! For **offenses must come**, but **woe to that man by whom the offense comes**!
 - b. We may **cause** someone else to sin
 - 1) The **woman** who wears immodest and enticing clothes is not innocent when a man looks to lust
 - 2) The man certainly **sins** when he **lusts**, but the woman **also sins**
 - c. We may **encourage** those who are already wicked
 - 1) 2 Sam. 12:14: ¹⁴ However, because by this deed you have **given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme**, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.”
 - 2) Ezek. 13:22: ²² “Because **with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad**, whom I have not made sad; and you have **strengthened the hands of the wicked**, so that he **does not turn from his wicked way** to save his life.
 - 3) Rom. 2:24: ²⁴ For “**the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you**,” as it is written.
2. In exercising **our liberties**, we may contribute to another’s sin
- a. Rom. 14:13: ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a **stumbling block** or a **cause to fall** in our brother’s way.
 - b. Rom. 14:15-21: ¹⁵ Yet if your brother is **grieved** because of your food, you are **no longer walking in love**. Do not **destroy** with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore **do not let your good be spoken of as evil**; ¹⁷ for the **kingdom of God** is not **eating** and **drinking**, but **righteousness** and **peace** and **joy** in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Therefore let us **pursue** the things which make for **peace** and the things by which one may **edify** another. ²⁰ **Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food**. All things indeed are **pure**, but it is **evil** for the man who **eats with offense**. ²¹ It is good neither to **eat meat** nor **drink wine** nor **do anything** by which your brother **stumbles** or is **offended** or is **made weak**.

- c. 1 Cor. 8:9-13: ⁹ But beware lest somehow this **liberty** of yours become a **stumbling block** to those who are weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone **sees** you who have knowledge **eating** in an idol's temple, will not the **conscience** of him who is weak be **emboldened to eat** those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your **knowledge** shall the weak brother **perish**, for whom Christ died? ¹² But when you thus **sin against the brethren**, and **wound their weak conscience**, you **sin against Christ**. ¹³ Therefore, if **food** makes my brother **stumble**, I will never again **eat meat**, lest I make my **brother stumble**.
- d. 1 Cor. 10:23-24: ²³ All things are **lawful** for me, but not all things are **helpful**; all things are **lawful** for me, but not all things **edify**. ²⁴ Let no one **seek his own**, but each one the **other's well-being**.
- e. 1 Cor. 10:31-33: ³¹ Therefore, whether you **eat** or **drink**, or whatever you **do**, do all to the **glory of God**. ³² **Give no offense**, either to the **Jews** or to the **Greeks** or to the **church of God**, ³³ just as I also **please all men in all things**, not seeking **my own profit**, but the **profit of many**, that they may be **saved**.
- f. If this happens, we are **not innocent**
- g. We need to develop the attitude of **Paul**
 - 1) 1 Cor. 9:19-22: ¹⁹ For though I am **free** from all men, I have made myself a **servant** to all, that I might **win the more**; ²⁰ and to the **Jews** I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are **under the law**, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; ²¹ to those who are **without law**, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; ²² to the **weak** I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become **all things to all men**, that I might by **all means save some**.
 - h. *Sam Dawson*: "Paul affirms we have the **technical right to do many things**, yet we **may sin** in so doing, because of **the influence our example exerts** on weaker Christians. We can **sin by doing something right!** *Our sin won't be what we did that was permissible, but our **disregard** for the weaker Christian.*" (Bold emphasis added, *Fellowship With God And His People*, 1988, 86)

F. By Supporting False Teaching

- 1. John condemned this kind of **support for sin**

- a. 2 Jn. 9-11: ⁹ Whoever **transgresses** and does not **abide** in the **doctrine of Christ** does not **have God**. He who **abides** in the **doctrine of Christ** has both the **Father** and the **Son**. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this doctrine**, do not **receive** him into your house nor **greet** him; ¹¹ for he who **greet**s him **shares** [*koinoneo*] in his evil deeds.
- b. We can partake in a false teacher's evil works by supporting him **financially** or **otherwise**
 - 1) False teachers do two very **terrible things**:
 - a) They **discourage** the righteous
 - b) They **encourage** the wicked to continue in their wicked ways
 - 1. Ezek. 13:22: ²² "Because **with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad**, whom I have not made sad; and you have **strengthened the hands of the wicked**, so that he **does not turn from his wicked way** to save his life.
- 2. On the other hand, when we **support a teacher of truth**, we partake in his good work
 - a. Php. 1:3-7: ³ I **thank** my God upon **every remembrance** of you, ⁴ always in **every prayer** of mine making **request** for you all with joy, ⁵ for your **fellowship** in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has **begun a good work** in you will **complete it** until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because **I have you in my heart**, inasmuch as both in my **chains** and in the **defense** and **confirmation** of the gospel, you all are **partakers** with me of grace.
 - b. Php. 4:14-17: ¹⁴ Nevertheless you have done well that you **shared** in my distress. ¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the **beginning of the gospel**, when I **departed from Macedonia**, no church **shared** with me concerning **giving** and **receiving** but you only. ¹⁶ For even in **Thessalonica** you **sent aid** once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷ Not that I seek **the gift**, but I seek **the fruit** that abounds to your account.
 - c. 3 Jn. 5-8: ⁵ Beloved, you **do faithfully whatever you do** for the **brethren** and for **strangers**, ⁶ who have **borne witness** of your **love** before the church. If you **send them forward** on their journey in a **manner worthy of God**, you will do well, ⁷ because they went forth for His name's sake, **taking nothing** from the Gentiles. ⁸ We therefore ought to **receive such**, that we may become **fellow workers for the truth**.

- d. *Sam Dawson*: “These passages disclose a **great blessing** that comes to us in **supporting others to preach the gospel** where we don’t have the ability to do it ourselves. On the other hand, when we **support one who teaches false doctrine**, we are **in fellowship with his evil works**. We ought always to look out that we **don’t partake** in another man’s sin in this regard. When we are part of a local church, we have a **God-given responsibility** we **cannot delegate** to anyone else, of knowing **what our money is spent for**. That way we can make sure we’re not a **participant in someone else’s sin**.”
(Bold emphasis added, *Fellowship With God And His People*, 1988, 88)

II. We Must Exercise Care In Establishing And Maintaining Fellowship In A Local Church

A. Let’s define some terms:

1. By **fellowship**, I mean **joint participation in spiritual things**

a. “**Fellowship**” (*koinonia*)

- 1) *BDAG*: “**close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship....** 2. **attitude of good will that manifests an interest in a close relationship, generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism....** 3. abstr. for concr. **sign of fellowship, proof of brotherly unity**, even **gift, contribution....** 4. **participation, sharing** *τινός in someth....*” (552-553)
- 2) *Thayer*: “*fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse*; in the N. T. as in class, Grk. 1. *the share which one has in anything, participation....* 2. *intercourse, fellowship, intimacy....* By a use unknown to prof. auth. *κοινωνία* in the N. T. denotes 3. *a benefaction jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution*, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship....” (352)
- 3) *Vine*: ““a having in common (*koinos*), partnership, fellowship’... denotes (a) the share which one has in anything, a participation, fellowship recognized and enjoyed; thus it is used of the common experiences and interests of Christian men, Acts 2:42; Gal. 2:9; of participation in the knowledge of the Son of God, 1 Cor. 1:9; of sharing in the realization of the effects of the blood (i.e., the death) of Christ and the body of Christ, as set forth by the emblems in the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 10:16; of participation in what is derived from the Holy Spirit, 2 Cor. 13:14 (RV, ‘communion’); Phil. 2:1; of participation in the sufferings of Christ, Phil. 3:10; of sharing in the resurrection life possessed in Christ, and so of fellowship with the Father and the Son, 1 John 1:3, 6-7; negatively, of the impossibility of ‘communion’ between

light and darkness, 2 Cor. 6:14; (b) fellowship manifested in acts, the practical effects of fellowship with God, wrought by the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers as the outcome of faith, Philem. 6, and finding expression in joint ministration to the needy, Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Heb. 13:16, and in the furtherance of the Gospel by gifts, Phil. 1:5.” (2:115)

b. Christians are **“fellows”**

- 1) **Disciples** (Jn. 11:16)
- 2) **Workers** (Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 1:24; 8:23; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:11; 3 Jn. 8)
- 3) **Citizens** (Eph. 2:19)
- 4) **Heirs** (Eph. 3:6)
- 5) **Soldiers** (Phil. 2:25; Phile. 2)
- 6) **Servants** (Col. 1:7; 4:7; Rev. 6:11)
- 7) **Laborers** (1 Th. 3:2; Phile. 1, 24)

2. By **“local church,”** I mean a group of **people** ostensibly **belonging to Christ** in a **given locality** who agree to **assemble** together regularly to **worship** God and to **work together collectively** as an **organized body** independent of any other organization

a. As you know the word **“church”** (*ekklesia*) is used in the NT in at least **three different ways** to refer to the people of God

- 1) The **“Universal”** Church (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24)
- 2) The **“Local”** Church (Mt. 18:17; Rom. 16:16; Jas. 5:14; Rev. 1:4)
- 3) The **“Assembled”** Church (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 28, 33-35)

B. Fellowship in the “universal church” is established automatically when one becomes a Christian, and **the Lord adds him** to the group of people that He calls “my church” (Acts 2:47)

1. When one becomes a Christian, he automatically becomes:

- a. A **member** of the body (Rom. 12:4-5)
- b. A **living stone** in the spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5)
- c. A **citizen** in the kingdom (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20)

d. A **child** in the family of God (Rom. 8:16-17; Heb. 3:6)

e. *Etc.*

C. But fellowship in a local church is not **established automatically**

1. What local church was the **Ethiopian eunuch** a member of immediately following his conversion? (Acts 8:26-39)
2. When **Paul** went away into Arabia after his conversion, what local church was he a member of? (Gal. 1:15-17)

D. Fellowship in a local church is established by **agreement** between an individual Christian and a local congregation

1. The saints in Jerusalem **refused to accept Paul** into their fellowship until they were **convinced** that he was a **disciple** (Acts 9:26-29)
 - a. This passage teaches **two important lessons**:
 - 1) **The individual Christian initiates the action** to establish fellowship with a local congregation of Christians
 - 2) **The local congregation has control over its fellowship** (i.e. the local church must not accept just anyone into its fellowship)
 - b. Objection: “This was a **special case**; they were afraid that Paul was an **imposter** who would put them in **prison** or put them to **death**”
 - 1) Well, the text says that they were **afraid that he was not a disciple**. It doesn’t say anything about their **fear of persecution** (Acts 9:26)
 - 2) And when **Barnabas** spoke up for him, he vouched for **the genuineness of his conversion**. Nothing is said about Barnabas reassuring them that they need not fear persecution (Acts 9:27)
 - 3) In fact, Paul’s journey to Jerusalem occurs **three years after his conversion** (Gal. 1:15-18), so he has not been persecuting the saints for three years
 - 4) But if we grant, for the sake of argument, that the saints in Jerusalem were **afraid of persecution**, what do you suppose they would have done if someone else had wanted to join them, and they **feared that he was not a disciple**?
 - a) There’s not a doubt in my mind that they would have done exactly **the same thing**

E. God wants us to be in **fellowship** with other Christians in a local church if this is **possible**

1. Christians in the NT were **not islands** unto themselves

a. Wherever the gospel was **preached** and people became **Christians** by believing and obeying it, **local churches** were established

1) **Jerusalem** (Acts 2:41-42, 44, 46-47)

2) **Antioch** (Acts 11:26; 13:1)

3) **Lystra, Iconium, Antioch** (Acts 14:21, 23)

4) **Ephesus** (Acts 20:17)

5) **Cenchrea** (Rom. 16:1)

6) **Corinth** (1 Cor. 1:2)

7) **Galatia** (Gal. 1:1-2)

8) **Philippi** (Phil. 1:1)

9) *Etc.*

b. The Christians in those churches **worshipped** and **worked** together in serving the Lord

2. As Christians, we need **the benefits** of associating and working together (Heb. 10:24-25)

a. **“Consider”** (*katanoëo*)

1) *BDAG*: “1. **notice, observe** carefully τὶ *some*th.... 2. **to look at in a reflective manner, consider, contemplate** τὶ *some*th.... 3. **to think about carefully, envisage, think about, notice** extension of mng. 1 and 2 τινά *someone*....” (522)

2) *Thayer*: “1. *to perceive, remark, observe, understand*.... 2. *to consider attentively, fix one’s eyes or mind upon*....” (334)

3) *Vine*: “‘to perceive clearly’ (*kata*, intensive, and No. 4), ‘to understand fully, consider closely,’ is used of.... thoughtfully ‘considering’ one another to provoke unto love and good works, Heb. 10:24. It is translated by the verbs ‘behold,’ Acts 7:31–32; Jas. 1:23–24; ‘perceive,’ Luke 20:23; ‘discover,’ Acts 27:39.” (2:123)

4) In other words, God want us to meditate and analyze **how to help** other Christians **be faithful** in their duties to Christ

b. “**Provoke**” (*paroxusmos*)

- 1) *BDAG*: “1. **rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking**...εἰς π. ἀγάπης *for encouragement in love, i.e. to encourage someone in love* Hb 10:24.
2. **a state of irritation expressed in argument, sharp disagreement**....
3. **a severe fit of a disease, attack of fever**, esp. at its high point: **convulsion**....” (780)
- 2) *Thayer*: “1. *an inciting, incitement*....: εἰς παρ. ἀγάπης [A. V. *to provoke unto love*], Heb. 10:24. 2. *irritation, [R. V. contention]*....” (490)
- 3) *Vine*: “(Eng., ‘paroxysm’), lit., ‘a sharpening,’ hence ‘a sharpening of the feeling, or action’ (*para*, ‘beside,’ intensive, *oxus*, ‘sharp’), denotes an incitement, a sharp contention, Acts 15:39, the effect of irritation; elsewhere in Heb. 10:24, ‘provoke,’ unto love.” (2:126)

3. So, God wants Christians to **assemble** and **work together** for their **individual good** and for the **advantage of the gospel of Christ** in their area

F. But **care** must be exercised in **establishing fellowship** both by an **individual Christian** and the **local church**

1. Because **fellowship** between Christians is based upon their **mutual fellowship** with God and Christ (1 Jn. 1:3)
 - a. We have **fellowship with God** if we **walk in the light** (1 Jn. 1:5-7)
 - b. Therefore, I have **fellowship with you** and you have fellowship with me if we **both have fellowship with God**
2. Because things are **not always as they appear** to be
 - a. This fact is significant for a **local church**, because those who **claim to be faithful Christians** are not always faithful Christians
 - 1) Some may be **hypocritical imposters**. The NT warns of:
 - a) **False prophets** (Mt. 7:15-20; 1 Jn. 4:1)
 - b) **False apostles** (2 Cor. 11:13-15)
 - c) **False brethren** (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:3-5)
 - d) **False teachers** (2 Pet. 2:1)
 - 2) Some may be honestly and **sincerely deceived**

- a) They may be **fine moral, religious people**, and I'm not saying that we should "**write them off**," but if they do not **enjoy fellowship with God**, we shouldn't treat them as though they do
 - b) We can **appreciate their sincerity and desire to serve the Lord** without depreciating either one and without being arrogant, condescending, harsh, and unloving
 - c) We can do as **Aquila and Priscilla** did and try "to teach them the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26)
 - d) We should do all within our power to **help them get into fellowship with God**, but we **cannot recognize them** as part of our local fellowship
- b. This fact is **significant** for the individual Christian, because a local church may **not be faithful** to the Lord
- 1) The Lord warned the church at **Ephesus** that unless they repented, He would remove their candlestick (Rev. 2:5)
 - a) Would Christ want you, as an individual Christian, to become a member of a church that had **lost its candlestick**?
 - 2) The church at **Sardis** had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead (Rev. 3:1)
 - a) There were a few who had not "**defiled their garments**" (Rev. 3:4)
 - b) And Jesus did not tell them to **leave**
 - c) A Christian can **go to heaven in a dead church** if:
 - 1. That church is not collectively doing something that is **unauthorized**
 - 2. You are not required to **violate your conscience** (Rom. 13:5; 14:5, 14, 22-23; 1 Cor. 8:7)
 - 3. You maintain your **spiritual life**
 - 3) Though the church at **Laodicea** thought that it was rich and in need of nothing, it was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev. 3:14-17)
 - 4) *Etc.*

3. Because (as we have already established) neither individual Christians nor local churches can have **fellowship with sin**
 - a. We are to **avoid the path** of the wicked (Pr. 4:14-15)
 - 1) To avoid a dangerous path, you must **recognize it for what it is** before you get there
 - b. We must not **be partakers of other men's sins** (Eph. 5:7; 1 Tim. 5:21-22)
 - c. We are to have **no fellowship** with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11)
 - d. We are not to **keep company** with impenitent Christians (1 Cor. 5:9-13)
 - e. We are not to be **unequally yoked** with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14-18)
 - 1) Is everyone who **claims** to be a "believer" **really a believer**?
 - f. We are to **withdraw** ourselves from the **disorderly** (2 Th. 3:6, 14)
 - 1) If **spiritual fellowship** and **social association** are to be withdrawn when a member of a local church begins to walk disorderly and refuses to repent, why should **spiritual fellowship** and **social association** be extended to a Christian who is walking disorderly and will not repent?
 - g. We are **not to receive** false teachers (2 Jn. 10)
4. Because we are commanded to **be cautious**
 - a. We are to **prove** all things
 - 1) As Christians we are to **prove**:
 - a) What is **good and acceptable** to the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2)
 - b) Our **own work** (Gal. 6:4)
 - c) **All things** (1 Th. 5:21)
 - d) **Deacons** (1 Tim. 3:10)
 - 2) Does this mean that we are to do something until it **proves to be wrong** or that we are to **prove that whatever we do is right** before we do it?
 - b. We must **try** all things
 - 1) As Christians, we must try:
 - a) The **spirits** (1 Jn. 4:1, 5-6)
 - b) Those who claim to be **apostles** (Rev. 2:2)

- 2) Does this mean that we let anyone preach and teach until he **proves to be a false teacher** or does it mean that we **prove him before we allow him to preach and teach**?
 - 3) I'm not saying that we should be **suspicious** [love is not suspicious (1 Cor. 13:7)], but neither should we be **gullible**, either. The mean between these two extremes is **caution**
- c. We are to **lay hands** hastily on no man (1 Tim. 5:22)
- 1) I know that the context is talking about the **selection and ordination of elders**
 - 2) But is there not a **principle** behind this instruction that would apply in other areas?
 - a) Should we **lay hands hastily** on evangelists? deacons? Bible class teachers? prospective members?
- d. We must **watch** (1 Cor. 16:13)
- 1) Elders are to watch out for **false teachers** (Acts 20:28-31)
 - a) Paul warns the Ephesian elders of two dangers:
 1. False teachers from **without**
 2. False teachers from **within**
 - b) Why did Paul warn these elders to **watch for false teachers** from without, if they were not to do everything in their power to **keep these false teachers from entering in** among the flock?
 - c) Who can believe that Paul would warn elders to **watch for grievous wolves** from without, but then expect them to **allow the wolves to enter in and kill a few sheep** before they did anything about it?
 - 2) Elders are to watch out for **souls** (Heb. 13:17)
5. I believe that all of these Bible principles teach, at least by implication, that reasonable **inquiry** and **investigation** needs to be made by an individual Christian who wants to "**join**" a **local church** and by a local church who must **receive or reject him**
- a. If not, why not?

G. There was a **pattern of commendation** in apostolic times

1. **Words of commendation** were written on behalf of many Christians in NT times
 - a. **Saul** (Acts 9:26-28)
 - b. **Apollos** (Acts 18:27)
 - c. **Phoebe** (Rom. 16:1-2)
 - d. **Messengers** from the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:3)
 - e. **Timothy** (1 Cor. 16:10-11; Phil. 2:19-23)
 - f. **Titus** (2 Cor. 8:23)
 - g. **Tychicus** (Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-9)
 - h. **Epaphroditus** (Phil. 2:25-30)
 - i. *Etc.*
2. If anyone and everyone who claimed to be a Christian was **accepted** by local churches in the first century, with **no questions asked**, why did Paul write these **words of commendation**?
3. Paul recognized that **some needed letters of recommendation** (2 Cor. 3:1-2)
4. Furthermore, **Paul warned brethren about certain ones**, both unfaithful Christians and outright false teachers
 - a. **Alexander** (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 4:14-15)
 - b. **Hymenaeus** (1 Tim. 1:19-20)
 - c. **Hermogenes** (2 Tim. 1:15)
 - d. **Phygelus** (2 Tim. 1:15)
5. *Sam Dawson*: “**Communication** in order to **establish fellowship** was a matter of **grave concern** during New Testament times with their sects, Judaizers, and false teachers. It should not be less so now, with our cults, denominations, false brethren, and false teachers.” (Bold emphasis added, *Fellowship: With God And His People*, 1988, 90)

H. Fellowship must not be extended on a **superficial basis**

1. A local church should **not extend fellowship** to someone who **requests** it simply because:
 - a. He claims to be a **Christian**
 - 1) He may be a **hypocritical imposter**

- 2) He may be **sincerely deceived**
 - 3) Just because someone **calls himself a Christian** is not enough grounds for our **recognizing** him as such
- b. He comes to us from a **“faithful church”**
- 1) First, a church may be **“faithful”** or **“sound”** in some areas and **unfaithful** and **unsound** in others
 - 2) Second, one who is **unfaithful** to the Lord may **leave** a “faithful church” to **avoid scriptural discipline**
 - a) If one congregation has scripturally **marked a brother** as being unfaithful to the Lord and **withdrawn themselves from him**, who would say that another church should **receive that person** into its fellowship?
- c. He **preaches the true gospel** of Christ
- 1) There were some who **preached the gospel of Christ**, and yet Paul did not **work** with them (Phil. 1:15-18)
 - a) *Sam Dawson*: “Both Paul and his **enemies preached the same gospel**, i.e., they had **common action**. Yet because they had entirely **different motives** in preaching the gospel, they were **not partners** with one another. Paul preached the gospel to **bring people into fellowship with God**. Paul’s enemies preached the same gospel to **bring Paul harsher punishment**.
 “Had you asked Paul whether he was **in fellowship** with his enemies, he assuredly would have said, ‘**No,**’ and they would have answered the same as well!” (Bold emphasis added, *Fellowship: With God And His People*, 1988, 78)
2. An **individual Christian** should **not seek** the fellowship of a local church simply because:
- a. They have a **scriptural name**
 - 1) Just because a group of people, claiming to be Christians, **rejects all denominational titles** and **selects a scriptural name**, that doesn’t mean they are **faithful Christians**
 - 2) There are **“churches of Christ”** that:
 - a) Worship with **instrumental music**
 - b) Teach **premillennialism**

- c) Preach and practice the “**Social Gospel**”
 - d) Teach error on **marriage, divorce, and remarriage**
 - e) Etc.
- b. They are **listed in a directory** of “faithful churches”
- 1) Sometimes various individuals or groups of Christians publish **lists of “faithful churches”**
 - 2) Depending on who publishes the list, **the concept of “faithfulness” differs** from list to list
 - a) This church might very well be on **one list** and not on **another**
 - 3) First, the publication of such lists may presume some **association of congregations** that did not exist in NT times
 - a) The NT does not contain **any organization larger than a local church**. Many such lists reflect an **alignment of local churches** that simply **did not exist** in the NT and are essentially denominational in nature
 - 4) Second, such lists of faithful churches are rarely based upon **“faithfulness” to Christ**
 - a) “Brethren: We wish to compile and publish a list of *loyal* congregations. We want to make a **directory** of local congregations for the benefit of the traveling brethren who wish to worship with loyal congregations: secondly, for the benefit of brethren who are desirous of **moving** to a loyal congregation. To compile this directory we need the following information. Describe **every act of worship** in your assemblies. Describe your position on the **communion**. Do you have **one or two communions** on Sunday? Do you use **only one cup and loaf**? Do you fellowship the **Sunday School or cups brethren**? Do you fellowship the **Old Paths Advocate**? Or **other digressives**? Do you advocate any doctrine or act of worship that is called a **hobby** by most of the brotherhood? If you want to be counted among the honored few, give us **correct answers** to all of our questions, otherwise you will be **left out** of our directory....Are you living in a **state of division**, having pulled off from another congregation? Please answer all questions. Do you contend that **the cup must have a handle on it?**” (Bold emphasis added, *Letter* quoted by W. Carl Ketcherside, “Schisms and Parties,” *Mission Messenger*, Nov. 1959, 4-5, quoted in Sam Dawson, *Fellowship: With God And His People*, 1988, 79)

- b) The concept of “**loyal**” in this letter has nothing to do with **loyalty to Christ**, at least it’s not stated
- c) Such a document seeks to produce **a line-up of local churches** that, in essence, is denominational itself

I. Fellowship must be extended on a **scriptural basis**

- 1. An individual Christian should **seek to join a local church** that is striving to **be what Christ wants a local church to be** in its work, worship, and organization
- 2. A local church should **extend fellowship** to those who are “**walking in the light**”

J. Answering Objections:

1. “**Judge not that ye be not judged** (Mt. 7:1)”

a. This statement cannot be **condemning all forms of judgment** because:

- 1) Judgment is **commanded** and **commended** in other NT passages (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 5:3, 12-13; 6:5)
- 2) Judgment is **demanding by the immediate context** of this passage (Mt. 7:6, 15)

b. This passage **condemns**

1) **Hasty judgment** (Mt. 7:1-2)

a) When James said: “Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive **heavier judgment**.” (Jas. 3:1), was he saying that Christians should not **strive to become teachers**?

- 1. Certainly not! (Heb. 5:12-14)
- 2. He was emphasizing the **tremendous responsibility** involved in teaching

b) Jesus is not **forbidding all judgment in this passage**, but He is warning us that we will be **judged by the same standard** that we use in judging others

2) **Hypocritical judgment** (Mt. 7:3-5; cf. Rom. 2:1-3)

a) Jesus **does not condemn** the man for trying to **take the mote** out of his brother’s eye. He condemns him for **not taking the beam** out of his own eye first

2. **“We should accept people at their word until their word proves to be unreliable?”**

- a. Evidently, Paul did not expect churches to **accept strangers** without **words of commendation**
- b. If a stranger were to come and ask to **place membership** with a church should he be accepted:
 - 1) If all he says is: **“I’d like to be a member of this church”**?
 - a) If you say **“No,”** then you have **surrendered** this objection
 - b) You have **conceded** that a local church has a **right to ask** at least some questions
 - 2) If all he says is: **“I’m a Christian, and I’d like to be a member of this church”**?
 - a) Might not a **denominationalist** say that very thing?
 - b) I know of a **nonChristian** who asked to become a member of a church (Eastside) in Bowling Green, KY. As it turned out, the preacher knew that she was not a NT Christian, and the situation was tactfully handled
 - c) I understand that another church (Parkway) in Bowling Green, KY **accepted a man who was not a NT Christian**, because they assumed he was
 - 3) If all he says is: **“I’ve been baptized, and I’d like to be a member of this church”**?
 - a) Might not an **affusionist** say that very thing?
 - 4) If all he says is: **“I’ve been immersed, and I’d like to be a member of this church”**?
 - a) Might not a **Baptist** say that very thing?
 - 5) If all he says is: **“I was a member of the You Name It Church of Christ; I’ve moved into this area, and I’d like to be a member of this church”**?
 - a) Might not those who were **walking disorderly in Thessalonica** have gone to **Berea** and said something like that?
 - b) Might not the **immoral brother in Corinth** have gone to Athens and said something like that?

- c) If one congregation has scripturally **marked a brother** as being unfaithful to the Lord and **withdrawn themselves from him**, who would say that another church should **receive that person** into its fellowship?
- d) There have been Christians who were in **unscriptural marriages** who have asked to place membership in this church (or other churches with whom I have labored in the past)
- c. If you can ask this stranger anything, then **what you ask** and **how much you ask** is a **matter of judgment**
- d. I know, I know, you want to know what to ask and **how much to ask** and **when you've asked enough**
 - 1) Well, that's a **matter of judgment**
 - 2) You stop when you have **made reasonable inquiry and investigation**
- 3. **"If we do this, we're just like the Baptists who vote people into the church"**
 - a. If that's so, does that mean that **it's necessarily wrong**?
 - 1) Baptists believe in the **verbal inspiration** of Scripture
 - 2) They teach that there are **three distinct persons** in the Godhead
 - 3) They believe in the **Virgin Birth** of Christ and the **deity** of Jesus
 - 4) They believe in the **bodily resurrection** of Jesus and the saints
 - 5) They teach that **baptism is immersion**
 - 6) *Etc.*
 - b. To be honest with you, **I am not familiar with the Baptists' practice of "voting."** I don't know what all is involved in that. But if our practice is exactly like that of the Baptists in every way, what does that prove?
 - 1) It doesn't **prove anything** one way or the other
 - c. All that we are doing is **testing a man's claims** by a **comparison of his life** with the **teachings** of the NT
- 4. **"There is no example in the NT where a church refused to extend fellowship to someone"**
 - a. The saints in Jerusalem **refused to accept Paul** into their fellowship until they were **convinced** that he was a **disciple** (Acts 9:26-29)

- b. But even **if there were no example** of this in the NT, that does not mean that there is **no authority for it**
 - c. Bible authority is established in more ways than by **approved examples**. It is also established by:
 - 1) Express **statement**
 - 2) Direct **command**
 - 3) Inescapable **implications**
 - d. Furthermore, there is **no example of**:
 - 1) A **church building** and maintaining a **meeting house** in which to meet
 - 2) Christians partaking of the Lord's Supper anywhere but in an **upper room**
 - 3) The gospel being preached on **radio** or **television**
 - 4) *Etc.*
 - e. Does this mean that there is **no authority** for these things?
5. **"Who are we to refuse fellowship to someone who is in fellowship with God?"**
- a. We don't have the right to **refuse fellowship to someone who is in fellowship with God**, and we have no intention of doing that
 - 1) **Diotrephes** was condemned when he did this very thing (3 Jn. 9-11)
 - b. But let me ask a question: **"Who are we to extend fellowship to someone who is not in fellowship with God?"**
 - c. You see that sword **cuts both ways**
 - d. Actually, this question **assumes** the thing that needs to be **proven** (i.e. that someone who **claims** to be in fellowship with God **actually is**)
6. **"What right do we have to question someone else's word?"**
- a. We have not only that **right** but the **responsibility** because:
 - 1) Christ has warned us that **"things are not always as they appear to be"**: false teachers are **wolves** in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15-23)
 - 2) And we have been **commanded** to:
 - a) **Prove** all things (1 Th. 5:21)

b) **Try** the spirits (1 Jn. 4:1)

c) **Watch** (1 Cor. 16:33)

d) *Etc.*

7. **“This practice could lead to terrible abuse”**

a. Yes, this practice could certainly **be abused**

b. But every **lawful practice** can be **abused**

1) **Preaching** from the pulpit can be abused when it is made a **“whipping post”** for the brethren

2) **Bible classes** can be abused

3) The **Lord’s Supper** was abused in Corinth (1 Cor. 11:17-22)

c. Are we to **abandon these practices**, simply because they **might be abused**?

d. Brethren we mustn’t **throw the baby out with the bath water**

8. **“Why would we want to talk with someone who has been scripturally baptized about local church membership?”**

a. Being a member of a local church is like **being on a team**, and to be a member of a team, one needs to know the **“team rules”**

b. When one wants to become a member of a local church, he needs to know **what God expects of him as a member of that “team”**

c. I once talked with a fellow who said he wanted to **become a Christian** and have his past sins forgiven, but he **didn’t want to “go to church”**

1) Should I have **baptized** him?

2) If he had wanted to be a **member “in name only”** (i.e. have his name on the membership roll), should he have been **accepted**?

3) I took him to Acts 2:42, and told him that it just **didn’t work that way**

K. Brethren, I believe that all of these passages and principles teach either, explicitly or implicitly, that a local church has not only the **right**, but also the **responsibility** to **control its membership**

1. *Allan Turner*: “I am afraid that **debate arguments** against the sectarians (e.g., ‘It’s easier to get into heaven than into a local Baptist church, etc.’) have influenced some among us into thinking we must **drop all barriers** concerning

local church membership. This is, of course, another example of **bending over backwards in an effort to stand up straight**. This is a serious mistake that has caused no little problem in some communities where practically any one walking down the aisle **claiming to be a member** of the Lord's Body is **accepted into fellowship** with very little, if any, **investigation**.” (Bold emphasis added, “Automatic Membership,” *The Bulletin*, Oct. 1, 1989, 26:40:3)

L. I do not believe that a local church should engage in an **“Inquisition,”** (complete with rack and thumbscrews) but I do believe that it has the **right** and the **responsibility** to make **“reasonable inquiry”**

1. What constitutes **“reasonable inquiry”** will be a **matter of judgment**, but many aspects of congregational activity involve matters of judgment

Conclusion:

I. **We can be partakers of other men's sins by:**

A. **Committing The Same Sin Together**

B. **Committing The Same Sin Separately**

C. **Consenting With Those Who Sin**

D. **Failing To Reprove And Rebuke Sin**

E. **Influencing Others To Sin By Our Example**

F. **Supporting False Teaching**

II. **We must exercise care in establishing and maintaining fellowship in a local church**

III. **Let me conclude our study the way we began with the words of the apostle Paul**

A. Eph. 5:5-7: ³ But **fornication** and all **uncleanness** or **covetousness**, let it not even be **named** among you, as is **fitting** for saints; ⁴ neither **filthiness**, nor **foolish talking**, nor **coarse jesting**, which are not **fitting**, but rather **giving of thanks**. ⁵ For this you know, that no **fornicator**, **unclean person**, nor **covetous man**, who is an **idolater**, has **any inheritance** in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one **deceive** you with **empty words**, for because of these things the **wrath of God** comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore **do not be partakers with** [*symmetochos*] **them**.

B. Eph. 5:8-11: ⁸ For you were once **darkness**, but now you are **light** in the Lord. **Walk as children of light** ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all **goodness**, **righteousness**, and **truth**), ¹⁰ finding out what is **acceptable** to the Lord. ¹¹ And have **no fellowship** [*synkoinoneo*] with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose** them.

Revised: 08/05/17; 09/30/25

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