

WITHDRAW FROM ONE IN ANOTHER CONGREGATION?

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The subject of withdrawal of fellowship is not a popular one today. It has been avoided by numerous congregations of the Lord's people. However, there are still a few who follow the Word of God and practice discipline as is laid out in the Bible. Among those who practice church discipline, questions arise concerning **who** can be disciplined. Some also have questions concerning the validity of withdrawal today. God has always required discipline among His people. In Genesis three, Adam and Eve sinned and were disciplined by God. In Joshua 7:1-6, Achan and his family were disciplined for disobedience. In Acts 5:1-11, Ananias and Sapphira suffered the discipline of death for lying to the Holy Spirit. In every dispensation of time, God has required discipline. Why would it be any different in the twenty-first century?

We will now notice two scenarios which may arise in a congregation and discuss the scripturalness of them. First, a person (person A), who is a member of congregation B, is sowing discord in congregation A. Does the eldership of congregation A have the authority to withdraw from person A who is sowing the discord? Some will argue that since the person is a member of another congregation (congregation B) that the eldership of congregation A has no authority because of "church autonomy." Brethren, we need to start using common sense when it comes to the Bible. Liberals, for years, have used this to escape withdrawal for unscriptural practices. Now, go back to the scenario and think about it carefully. If a person in congregation B is sowing discord in congregation A, then the elders in congregation A have every right to mark and withdraw from this person. That person **cannot** hide behind "church autonomy" to destroy another congregation. Notice Paul's statement: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17-18). This verse goes past congregational lines of autonomy. **Any** person causing division is to be marked and avoided. In 1 Timothy 5:20 Paul wrote, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." If a person is sowing discord, he is sinning and must be rebuked before all. Not only does congregation A have the right to withdraw, but if the elders of congregation B were *worth their salt*, they would also mark that individual as well if he refused to repent.

Now to scenario two. A person who is a member of congregation (A) sows discord in that congregation. He then moves his membership to another to avoid withdrawal, but continues to sow discord in congregation A. Can the eldership in congregation A withdraw from this person after he has left? The answer to this one would be the same as to the one above. The eldership in congregation A has every

right to withdraw from someone causing division in their flock. Brethren, a problem today in the church is that man will often *church hop* to avoid any form of discipline, but when man is sowing discord among his brethren, he must be marked. Paul in writing to Titus gave the eldership the authority to stop the mouths of the “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers” (Tit. 1:7-11). Those sowing discord definitely fit in that category. Notice the Proverb writer in Proverbs 6:16, 19: “These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him... A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” Sowing discord is a sin whether a person is a member of one congregation or another.

Why should the eldership of congregation A practice discipline on a person who left congregation A or never was a member of the congregation? There are a number of reasons. First, discipline is practiced to save the person’s soul. Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 5:1-11, that a person in sin is not to be fellowshiped. Notice, however, verse five: “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.” The verse means that fellowship is to be withdrawn so he will realize the seriousness of his sin and repent before he loses his soul. Second, discipline is practiced to keep the church pure. In 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Paul shows that the “old leaven” must be purged to keep the church pure. If the discipline does not take place, then the church could be destroyed internally by division. Disease in the physical body must be removed to keep the body pure and the same is true with the church. Third, discipline is practiced to help the church progress. In Acts 5:11-14, the church grew (progressed) after the discipline of Ananias and Sapphira. Had they not been disciplined, the church would have been hindered in growth.

When a person is sowing discord within the body of Christ, he must be disciplined. An eldership not only has the authority, but more than that, the **responsibility** to mark and avoid any who are trying to destroy the church. Brethren, when we start following God’s Word and start using common sense, the man who sows discord will not have an audience, because the faithful will mark and avoid him.~