
Principles of Action relating to Discipline in the House of God

..by..

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Principles of Action

relating to

Discipline in the house of God

I

Our Attitude as to Discipline

There are some scriptural principles relating to cases of difficulty and the judgment of evil to which I wish to call attention.

When called to deal with such matters in God's house, we especially need exercise before the Lord as priests to discern between the clean and unclean. We need to judge all fleshly, selfish feelings or motives. They are of a leprous character, and ill become any who take the responsibility of judging leprosy. The energy and way of the flesh, reinforced by pride of knowledge, does not work the will of the Lord. It is as strange fire in the house of God, and must suffer the Lord's rebuke. The spirit of mourning and confession becomes us (1 Cor. 5: 2; Ezra 9), the eating of the sin-offering in the holy place (Lev. 10)—that bearing of the sin upon our hearts into the presence of God, suffering because of the sorrow and pain it causes, and the injury and shame it brings; feeling, indeed, how Christ is wounded and pained in a member. Thus only will undue harshness and severity, or unjust discrimination be excluded from such solemn work as rebuking or judging sin in others. Hands under fleshly impulse or control cannot use the balances of the sanctuary to the Lord's honor (Lev. 10: 8-11).

The assembly of God is not a court of justice. It is God's household, His family, His house. We are not to assume

a judicial character, as though it was a question of *right* to exercise discipline or judgment. Rather should such circumstances compel deep sorrow, as recognizing we are *obliged* to exercise it. If the father of a family finds it necessary to put his son out of his house lest he corrupt it, would not this be cause for weeping and mourning, for sorrow of heart, as a shame and dishonor to the family? Little would they talk about it; others out of love to spare them would also refrain. We cannot think of the other children saying, "We have a *right* to help our father in turning our brother out of the house." Is not putting out to our common shame? Is it not anguish and sorrow? Does it not invariably come from our failure in godly pastoral care, and loving watchfulness and faithful solicitude for one another's welfare?

To exercise discipline in a manner suited to God, the assembly needs to be brought to see the sin of the individual as the sin of the assembly. The apostle pressed this upon the Corinthians—the sin and the evil-doer are *among you*; ye have not mourned; put away from *among yourselves* (1 Cor. 5). Thus he would force them to the conviction that the sin is *theirs*, as well as that of the man. The existing conditions and the nature of the case may necessitate patient and loving labor, in forbearance and longsuffering, to bring about unanimity of exercise, out of which will come godly action in the energy of the Spirit. The apostle wrote *to them* out of much affliction and anguish of heart, and with many tears, not with any desire to grieve, but that they might know his abundant love (2 Cor. 2: 4). Titus and Timothy went *there* to labor in the assembly for that unanimity of exercise as to the sin which would lead them to deal with it as *their own*, not as sitting in judgment, going through a judicial process, but, as deeply humbled and broken in spirit, clearing themselves of what had become their own sin, as in grace they ate the sin-offering and confessed in the spirit of Daniel, "We have sinned." What they then were forced to do to the offender they would

feel as done to themselves. The energy of the Spirit is shown in patient labor to bring saints to this place of mourning according to God, and *then* to take action. See 1 Cor. 7: 7-13. In this, I fear, we have too often failed, allowing the impatience of the flesh to govern our spirits. When action is based on supposed *right* to judge, usually the energy of the flesh will be found at work, then the assembly is spiritually weak. I doubt not, it is only weakened the more by judgment executed in that manner, because the right spirit of exercise is lacking, though perhaps there may be much indignation. When this is the case, it is small wonder there is little spiritual power to recover and restore. If we, like Israel, go up against our brother or brethren to execute judgment (Judges 20) *we get it*; and that, as we see there, by God's own direction.

Let us turn to some scriptures which give us the principles to which I first alluded.

II

Questions of Procedure

When, individually or corporately, that arises which on scriptural grounds calls for appeal or protest, this is to be made *to*, not *from*, the individual or assembly concerned. Furthermore, should the need arise for the cooperation of others, this is to be sought within the *nearest*, not the remotest connection. Two important considerations follow.

(a) Evil is to be examined and judged at the place where it exists.

(b) The knowledge and the work of judging evil is to be kept within the most restricted bounds—not spread by the printed page, private correspondence, and other means carrying defilement and infection to other parts.

Scripture so instructs us, for the apostle addressed the assembly at Corinth concerning the evil in their midst (not

Ephesus, or Rome). Thus he labored with them, sending also Timothy and Titus to continue the work personally. Compare 1 Cor. 4: 17; 16: 10; 2 Cor. 2: 13; 7: 5-7; 12: 18. He had also desired Apollos to go (1 Cor. 16: 12). He did not appeal *from* them, but *to* them, and sought to reach them in that way. This the Lord blessed with success, giving His servant cause for abundant thanksgiving.

Again, in the serious controversy recorded in Acts 15, the question was not made the subject of a general appeal to the whole Church. Both the consideration and decision, under the Spirit's guidance, was limited to chosen representative brethren from Antioch *only* (where the question became an issue with those coming from Jerusalem) who went up to the local assembly at Jerusalem. This precedent we would do well to follow. It appears the more striking since the matters involved affected the whole Church, for they related to the whole truth of the gospel and practical Christian life, as shown in the epistle to the Galatians.

Similar instruction is afforded by Matt. 18: 15-20. First, consider that the course there prescribed is to be followed in the spirit which the whole chapter inculcates, that of lowliness, self-judgment, seeking love, and readiness to forgive—not that of harshness, legality, and exaction. The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. Presentation to the assembly is the *last* step, not the first. Nor does the Lord set a limit as to how often we are to visit, either privately or with others, nor how long we may wait before the third step is taken. Plainly for each case there will be need for wisdom and grace to act in a suited manner, so that we are compelled to feel our dependence upon the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Scripture gives much which shows how our blessed and holy God patiently waits, suffers long, labors in giving repeated witness to the erring, and only judges as a last resort. This is our example in dealing with evil, for we are to be imitators of Him as dear children. Through patient waiting on both sides, hearts will be searched, consciences exercised, self-judgment promoted in

all, while such labor proceeds. It is well to keep in mind that we are never out of a path of faith for which the Word alone can furnish us. To get its furnishing calls for patience, lowliness, and obedience on our part. We are not governed by rules or regulations, but by moral and spiritual conditions in which we are to seek a right way to use and apply the Word of God.

But what we get in Matt. 18 may be of broader application. First, without a doubt, it is individual in character. It affords instruction regarding action between fellow-members of the one Body. But such gather in assemblies, and in view of the truth of our unity in the Body, we rightly conclude that what governs relation and action between individual members of that Body becomes applicable in principle to relation and action between assemblies of the saints. Let us apply it.

If one assembly falls into a position similar to that of the erring brother, then another assembly (or even an individual Christian) having knowledge of the matter may with propriety go *to*, or appeal *to* such regarding the matter in question, *not appeal from it to the whole Church*. As in an individual case, so in that of assemblies, conference should be granted, and the matter be considered together in the spirit and manner already indicated. Should there be failure to effect oneness of mind after patient and loving labor, it would be in order for those appealing to the assembly to seek the cooperation of other *near-by* gatherings, that in continued conference and mutual exercise a godly issue may be found. This procedure would answer to the second step in Matt. 18. I have said *near-by gatherings*, for just as in Matt. 18 the cooperation of *local* brethren is contemplated, not the calling of some from a distance, so in the wider application here suggested it would be those from near-by whose help would be sought, thus circumscribing as much as possible the area affected by the trouble. Necessity might call for even a further enlargement of the circle dealing with the matter, and this, it might be conceived, would ultimately

extend to the Church at large. This, however, would be most exceptional, as also extreme assembly discipline in individual cases, when the course outlined in Matt. 18 is followed in a godly manner. These scriptures give principles of action which we dare not slight. If we do, we need not be surprised that confusion and strife result. It is failing to do things "comelily and with order" (1 Cor. 14: 40, *N. Trans.*). To reverse this order is to practically defy the Lord's authority, however, unintentionally.

Now as to 1 Cor. 6 which relates to difficulties between brethren; this passage plainly directs that such matters should be considered and adjusted by brethren of the assembly to which the contending brothers belong (vers. 4, 5). Scripture does not give us warrant to send *immediately* to outside places for others, or to servants of the Lord to come in and adjust such matters. If the latter are at the place, laboring among the saints, they may indeed help; but otherwise I believe the Lord intends the saints where such difficulties arise to face the matters together and with Him, as humbled too by the very necessity of being occupied in such business. If the help of others is needed, let this be sought only after prayerful and patient endeavor in dependence upon the Lord to reach a solution among themselves. If for some reason the Lord allows the matter to be too hard for them He surely intends them to seek the help needed, still counting upon Him to direct and give from whatever source it may please Him.

These examples show that according to the Lord's mind evil is to be examined and judged at the place where it arises; that such labor is to be confined to that place, and that the Lord intends trouble and evil to be confined to the narrowest limits possible.

Contrarily, a wide dissemination of information to the whole Church, or any part of it, causes opinions to be formed, and in fact, promotes prejudgment, since all the evidence and witnesses cannot be examined by those communicated with in that unscriptural manner. It unneces-

sarily occupies saints with evil, carrying defilement and strife to many parts, and tends to (if not actually producing) a prejudiced state of mind, leading to extreme conclusions on one side or the other, so fomenting division among those who have neither the responsibility nor competency to judge. This practically violates the principles taught in such scriptures as John 7: 51; Deut. 1: 17; 16: 19; Lev. 19: 15; Jas. 2: 9.

Furthermore, such activity, both public and private, partakes of the character of "evil speaking" (1 Pet. 2: 1, *katalalia*, literally, "speaking against"), which is not necessarily wicked speech, as falsehood or profanity, but a setting forth of another's ways so as neither to help him nor others. This is devoid of that love which seeks to cover, not expose, a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4: 8; Gen. 9: 22, 13); and utterly lacks that brotherly affection, mutual consideration, and pity to which the Word exhorts. Did we but take our brother's sin as our own, and so consider it before the Lord, feeling the injury and shame of it both to him and ourselves, and the pain and sorrow to the Lord Himself through one of His members, we would not stoop to action so unworthy of our place and calling.

Such a course inevitably produces party spirit, and there is soon manifested "strifes, jealousies, angers, contentions, evil speakings (same word as 1 Pet. 2: 1), whisperings, puffings up, disturbances" (2 Cor. 12: 20, *New Trans.*).

If under the incitement of such procedure individuals or assemblies attempt to judge a matter which is not within their local responsibility, and which, by reason of circumstances they cannot properly investigate at the place where it belongs, as Scripture directs, they are not only acting outside of scriptural order, but unrighteously. They must necessarily judge according to the appearance, instead of exercising righteous judgment (John 7: 24). They indeed act contrary to the principles of Scripture given to guide in forming a righteous judgment, as already mentioned, and which is also a common principle of justice recognized among men (Acts 25: 16, *New Trans.*).

III

The Truth of the One Body in Relation to Discipline

If conditions arise as to any matter of discipline which make necessary help from others, this may certainly be sought, and should be extended. The justification for this is found in the truth of the one Body. As being gathered on this ground, as fellow-members we are to be helpers together of one another.

For the exercise of this liberty, we have guidance for our practice in the scriptures already considered. They show where, and how, and within what limits, we are to deal with evil. In the light of what we have considered it is clear that *first* help should be sought from saints near-by, simply requesting them to join in an appeal *to* those whose action or conduct is called in question, that in conference together with them at the place where the trouble exists, all may prayerfully and patiently investigate the whole matter. In such circumstances it is of first importance that *all* concerned should engage in earnest prayer to God, humbling themselves because of divided judgments, fleshly alienations, and unjust discrimination, which so often enter into such a situation. God is not the author of confusion, and if we find ourselves in such a state the shame of it lies at our door. This imperatively calls us to mingle our prayers and tears together in sincere confession and self-judgment. He cannot come in for us unless we take our right place before Him.

When, however, the truth of the one Body is used to justify the spreading abroad of evil, on the plea that all should know with what they are identified because as members one of another it belongs to all, I believe an unholy use is being made of that precious truth. The harmful character and effects of such action, already pointed out, should be sufficient to show this. In fact all we have considered militates against this idea when evil is in question.

Scripture indicates its confinement within the narrowest possible limits as the course of wisdom and love. The Word makes plain that the existence of evil affects all, quite irrespective of any effort on our part to spread the matter. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." But we are not to act as though that passage read, "If one member suffer, *make* all the members suffer with it." Scripture is wiser than we are, and does not instruct us by precept or example to take such action. To restrict it, and limit its spread, to prevent defilement with its harmful effects, in no way nullifies the fact that all of the Body suffers, for this sad effect results from the spiritual constitution of the Body.* A diseased spot in our bodies affects in measure the whole physical frame. But no one having a putrid sore in one member makes wounds in numerous other parts of his body, and takes out putrid matter from the affected spot to infect all other parts so as to make, as we might say, all members suffer. This would be folly indeed, but is it less to do likewise in the Body of Christ?

Here reference may be made to the question of local action in relation to the whole Church. Certainly every assembly is responsible to act in regard to any question arising within itself. As to any other question the course plainly indicated in the Word is appeal to, not a forming of independent judgment apart from a full consideration of

* "It is not said merely that they ought, but that they do. Whether it be good or ill, all that is according to God in a Christian goes out for blessing to all the rest; and there is not an ill or scandal in a saint at the Antipodes which does not affect with its shame and suffering every other in these lands....the effect is real throughout the Church. It is a body—the Body of Christ—and as a whole it feels in joy or sorrow: else it were not a real organic unity. Undoubtedly also its present condition, with denominational barriers...as well as the allowance of the world in most, reduces spiritual sensibility to the lowest: still, far from desiring otherwise, one dares not deny that it subsists, surviving these deplorable hindrances by its own vitality, as flowing from the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in the Church." (W. Kelly, 1 Cor.).

all with those immediately concerned. The local assembly is the organ of government by which the discipline and order of God's house is maintained. The recognition of any action taken by it depends, not on who takes it, or where it is taken, but on its agreement with the requirements of the Word. It is responsible to deal with whatever takes place within its own circle in accordance with the Word, be it moral or doctrinal, ever remembering that it is acting for the whole Church, since we gather upon the ground of the truth of the one Body. Just because of this, such action is open to protest if scriptural reason can be shown for questioning the action, which protest should be voiced in appeal to the assembly involved; and that same truth of the Body requires that the assembly open its doors for inquiry and investigation in conference with their appealing brethren.

If a brother dealt with dissents from action in his case, or a group of brothers dissent from action in any case, it is not for the one or the others to disseminate the matter, by publishing the details of evil so that trouble is increased by thus spreading it to many places. This unnecessarily occupies saints with evil so that many are defiled, produces prejudice, and a prejudgment of the matter (since a full hearing of evidence and witnesses can only be had at the place where the trouble exists and with all the parties involved), a result plainly contrary to what Scripture enjoins as to forming righteous judgment.

When, in the interests of righteousness and peace, protest is believed necessary, appeal should take the form of a simple request to brethren elsewhere to come in for help and counsel together with all concerned at the place where the action has been taken. Those thus requested to come in to help should first address appeal to the brethren or assembly concerned, desiring opportunity to confer together and seek in a godly way to reach common ground. If brethren, or an assembly, refuse to consider such an effort to secure both righteousness and peace, surely continued labor

is needful in a patient and lowly spirit with much prayer to God, who is our only resource in such trying circumstances, confident that He will hear and answer. The words of Eph. 4: 1-3 express the Spirit's pleading that we maintain every link that can be maintained in the face of difficulty, opposition and distress. This would be a pursuit of the way of peace among ourselves, tend to that upbuilding in love which should characterize our service with one another, and be using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace, so that it may be true of us, "That ye all say the same things, and that there be not among you divisions; but that ye be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same opinion" (1 Cor. 1: 10, *New Trans.*).

When an assembly acts in accordance with the Word, it is the obligation of all to abide by the action. If, however, another assembly finds scriptural reason to question the action, or failure of action, when required by the Word, its recourse is not to take up the matter among themselves and pronounce judgment upon it, but, as we have seen, to appeal to the other assembly, seeking opportunity to confer together over the difficulty in the way already indicated. Failure in this, after labor marked by both patience and long-suffering, would make the next step an appeal to brethren elsewhere, not as spreading abroad the matter, the evil of which has been already pointed out, but as simply requesting them to join in continued appeal and further conference, seeking to give help and counsel to the contending assemblies, such labor being confined to the place where the trouble arose.

Not to follow this course, but instead, upon their own judgment, to call for separation, or actually separate, from the assembly against which the protest has been made, and make efforts to induce saints everywhere to take sides, and so ultimately bring about world-wide division, is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. It should be met by assemblies elsewhere appealing at once to the contending meetings, requiring that the whole matter be opened to inquiry and in-

vestigation. If such efforts were refused, by one or both of the assemblies involved, I believe the path of wisdom would be to consider such a meeting or meetings to be avoided as far as practical intercourse is concerned,* while continued efforts were made to lead them to accede to the scriptural order of procedure. Such avoidance would be with the view of checking the spread of the disaffection through free intercourse, as well as a testimony and admonition. This I believe is justified whenever and wherever brethren threaten with division through unscriptural procedure, from which confusion and strife result in a widespread way.

These considerations, it appears to me, grow out of the application of the principle of the one Body upon which we profess to be gathered.

As in individual cases, assembly action is the last resort, and the extreme discipline of "putting out" the last act to be taken; so when saints who hold like precious truth and profess like principles are in question it is certain that separation as commanded in 2 Timothy should be action taken only after every effort has been exhausted to preserve unity as walking together in the truth.

Our safety lies in conformity to the Word of God. Only by keeping trouble and evil within the narrowest bounds and so judging it, do we seek and pursue peace. Only so do we endeavor to preserve peace, that bond by which practically the unity of the Spirit is kept, and thus further the things which edify in love.

* Such a case would parallel that of a brother walking disorderly (2 Thess. 3: 6-16), and in principle require similar action, for as already mentioned the truth of the one Body and our relation to one another as fellow-members leads us to conclude that what applies to the relations and actions of member with member may rightly apply to assemblies in their relations and actions.

When assemblies fail it should be plain we have no other principles to guide us in regard to them than in regard to individuals. Assemblies are but gatherings of individuals, and holiness can have no other requirements in this case than in the other.

IV

1 Cor. 5, and Leprosy

In examining such difficulties as are contemplated in 1 Cor. 6, evil might be uncovered which would require extreme discipline.

In applying 1 Cor. 5: 11-13 the assembly must be sure that the person is "wicked." They are not called upon to put out any one else. To so deal with every offender is wrong and works mischief; for there are other forms of discipline—rebuke in some cases and withdrawal in others, the latter being of individual character and not assembly action. Let us see what it means to be wicked. *Poneros**

* This adjective means first *oppressed by toils*; then in a *bad case*, or *plight*, from which it runs into the sense of *morally bad*. It is related to the word *ponos* which means *hard, vigorous labor—battle*, for instance—so *poneros*, in a moral sense, indicates *active wickedness, dangerous, destructive*. Satan is called the wicked (*poneros*) one. It means to be malignant, and so manifesting extreme malevolence or enmity, viciously bent on doing harm or evil (*Vincent and Green*).

Thus the word for "covetous," and "covetousness" implies more than we may usually attribute to it. This becomes evident from a comparison of passages in which it is used. The covetous man desires and seeks to take away what another possesses. He is avaricious. It is the lust of having, not confined to gain, an unlawful desire to possess oneself of something in opposition to good morals, for example in 1 Thess 4: 6 (defraud), where the reference is to relations with women; Eph. 4: 19, "to work all uncleanness with *greedy unsatisfied lust*," and Eph. 5: 3, "But fornication and all uncleanness," or *unbridled lust*; (ver. 5), "person of unbridled lust, who is an idolater;" Col. 3: 5, "unbridled desire which is idolatry." Compare also 2 Pet. 2: 3, 14. I have quoted the New Translation. In the preface to the German Translation of the New Testament we read, "With regard to [these] words, which all have translated by 'covetousness' or 'covetous man,' we have also retained this meaning. We are, however, convinced that this word, indicating an unbridled inclination (or affection) for that which does not belong of right to the one filled with *pleonexia*, signifies 'fleshly lust,' as well as covetousness. See Eph. 5: 3, 5; Col. 3: 5; 2 Pet. 2: 3, 14; 1 Thess. 4: 6; 1 Cor. 5: 10, 11; Eph. 4:

is the word, and it signifies the active exercise of the vicious disposition and desires, not merely a single act, not a man taken in some offence (Gal. 6: 1)†, but positive injurious

19. This last passage explains the general use of the word. Some of the passages are not so distinct, but they will help the reader." (J. N. D., Coll. Writ., Vol. 13; p. 283.)

An "extortioner" (1 Cor. 5:11) is better, "rapacious" (*New Trans.*), that is, one living by preying on others, and that with the idea of violence or unlawful methods, as for example, a *rapacious* usurer.

† In this passage the word "fault" is *paraptoma*, rendered "trespasses" in the Gospels; used of Adam's "offence" in Rom. 5; of Israel's "fall," Rom. 11:11,12; Eph. 1:7; 2: 5; Col. 2: 13, "sins;" 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2: 1; Col. 2:13 "trespasses;" James 5: 16, "faults." Of this word, Trench says, "It is the falling where one should have stood upright." Vincent says, "It is a conscious violation of right, involving guilt, and occurs therefore, in connection with the mention of forgiveness (Rom. 4: 25; 5: 16; Col. 2: 13; Eph. 2: 1, 5) . . . it carries with it the thought of sin affecting the sinner, and hence is found associated with the consequences and the remedy of sin (Rom. 4: 25; 5: 15, 17; Eph. 2: 1)." I call attention to this to show that the Spirit of God has more in mind than is conveyed by the English word "fault" which we think of as "a slight offence, a neglect of duty or propriety, resulting from inattention or lack of prudence rather than from design to injure or offend, but liable to censure or objection." In biblical Greek the word carries the thought of intention, of will. "Overtaken" does not mean *detected in the act*, but *surprised by the fault*, taken before he is aware.

One so caught by sin, and this having become known, is to be "restored," in the sense that this word signifies, *re-adjust, set to rights, bring into line*. Hence also its meaning to *perfect*, as in Eph. 4: 12; 1 Pet. 5: 10. "The radical notion of the verb is *adjustment*—the putting of all the parts into right relation and connection. We find it used of mending the nets (Matt. 4: 21), and of restoring an erring brother (Gal. 6: 1), of Christians being "perfectly joined together" (1 Cor. 1: 10), of being "perfect" (2 Cor. 13: 11), and so in "the general sense of *perfecting* (Matt. 21: 16; Luke 6: 40; 1 Thess. 3: 10)." In medical language it is used of setting a bone or joint. This helps to show the line of service intended. Serious as the trespass may be it is not the wickedness of 1 Cor. 5, and so putting out is not in view, and though the case might call for public rebuke there is to be the loving labor here indicated to properly adjust all.

Beautifully the exhortation follows: "Bear one another's burdens." The word "Burdens" here primarily refers to

activity, a living in sin. By this the person places himself, at least outwardly, in the class of those who have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God, Eph. 5: 5; 1 Cor. 6: 9, 10, passages which mention the same evils as denounced in 1 Cor. 5. Such a person belongs not "within," but "outside" where God judges. There he must be put, awaiting the results which may come from this extreme discipline. Such wickedness virtually raises the question as to whether the person is a child of God. If godly sorrow and repentance ensue, the assembly may have assurance, so that love may be confirmed in forgiveness and restoration to Christian privileges.

In this connection, what leprosy teaches, and its application to the judgment of evil may be briefly considered (Lev. 13: 14). It is the type of active injurious wickedness, like that of 1 Cor. 5. Thus the shutting out of the leper answers to the putting out of that chapter. The fact that the leper must be left to God, man being powerless, and his being put out of the camp, clearly suggests the place outside where God judges (1 Cor. 5: 12, 13). Though thus "separated from the assembly, and in his true place, he might yet hope in God, from whom alone could come help and healing in so great a strait."

Two things determine leprosy:

(a) The spot deeper than the skin. This shows the evil *actively* at work. It is the sign of deep-seated evil.

(b) The hair turned white—departed strength, manifest decay, freshness and vigor gone. "The decay of spiritual strength will be very plainly discernable in such cases."

What is seen to be "white" upon priestly examination makes shutting up necessary to determine whether these two

moral infirmities and errors, and the sorrow, shame, remorse which they awaken in the offender. Is not this one way of eating the sin-offering, in doing which we will surely be led to consider ourselves? This will promote that spirit of meekness, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 23) so essential to the labor of restoration here enjoined.

features will become manifest. Here "white" is evidently the sign of evil at work. If what was white becomes "dull" and does not spread, the person is not leprous, and he washes his clothes—a necessity, however, which intimates that some form of uncleanness had been there, but not leprosy. To be "dull" suggests that what was at first intense in character had died down, and since it did not spread it did not characterize the person, his life was not so characterized. This, it would seem, might apply to a man overtaken in some offence (Gal. 6: 1), such cases finding illustration in the several instances of shutting up mentioned in Leviticus.

On the other hand, if one who is really a leper has the leprosy covering all his flesh he is pronounced clean: "it is all turned white." "The disease had come all to the surface, the man was covered with it, and yet in fact the vital power had thrown it off: here, if there was no raw flesh, the man was to be pronounced clean. Sin *thus* manifested in confession and open assumption of the shame—a genuine, hearty, unreserved breakdown before God and man—here God's grace has wrought, and grace must be shown." This is a case in which the energy of spiritual life has overcome the evil, leading to its full acknowledgement, and submission to God's judgment. In such a case evil is no longer *active*. The person is clean.

There are two courses of action—shutting *out* and shutting *up*. We have seen what the former signifies. The latter commences only *after* preliminary priestly examination, and continues only during the time of priestly investigation. It is not *deprivation* of place, as though one was already pronounced a leper. It is *investigation* of the condition. If the first examination gives reason to suspect sin at work, there is shutting up, which suggests for us the necessary pastoral care and priestly work to determine the nature of a case of sin. In Israel this would appear to mean some measure of restraint as to usual activities, and also confine the suspect to his own quarters pending the result of investigation, as a guard against possible danger of contamin-

ation in the camp. For us it means the loving exercise of godly care to "restore" our brother when "the bright spot" of sin is found in him. In its way this is like putting in ward until the Lord's mind is known (Lev. 24: 12; Num. 15: 34). Such scriptures as 2 Thess. 3: 6-15 and Jude 22 would indicate our attitude, and 1 Pet. 4: 8 the spirit to mark our procedure. If the first examination gives reason to suspect wickedness such as mentioned in 1 Cor. 5, then it may be fitting for the sake of the Lord's honor and the public testimony to ask the brother or sister to refrain from the breaking of bread. But this needs to be carefully guarded against abuse. It is not the same as the discipline of 1 Cor. 5, and must not be permitted to become this in the mind of the individual or others, *nor should it continue longer than the process of investigation itself*, which, conducted according to the Word, will result in either clearance from charge or the establishment of guilt. If the latter, then action must follow as the Word may direct.

V

Doctrinal Evil

Now what Scripture gives in regard to the treatment of doctrinal evil requires consideration.

Acts 15, already referred to, records action as to a serious doctrinal question which surely affords abiding instruction. Apparently those whose teaching the apostle so energetically combated everywhere were not set aside from fellowship, though not given place to for an hour. They were resisted in faithful love.

In Corinth serious doctrinal evil was present. The apostle wrote to correct and reprove its advocates, but prescribes no course of action in discipline such as in the moral case.

A reason for this seems evident. Such a moral case is so great a breach of what becomes those professing godliness, and is so glaringly manifest to the world at large, that action is necessary to manifest before all the honor of the Lord's name and the proper character of the assembly which is God's house, for holiness becomes that house forever.

On the other hand questions of doctrine are always more or less intricate and difficult. They may greatly disturb us and arouse much concern, but are usually of such a nature that they are not understood by those without. Thus they may not compromise the Lord's honor or testimony as does a case of flagrant moral evil. If, however, such matters are allowed to produce fleshly strife among the saints, leading to exhibitions of conduct which the world itself can readily notice, then such effects become a serious reproach upon the Christian name and testimony—a result which, it must be sadly admitted, has only too often occurred since the second Christian century.

Certain cases of doctrinal difference may come under Titus 3: 10, 11. One not subject to the evident teaching of the Word, who shows self-will and a party-making spirit, is to be rejected after the second admonition. This is not excommunication. Such action would rather take the form of refusal to permit such to minister and so disaffect others by erroneous views.

That which corrupts the simplicity of the gospel and destroys its liberty is compared to leaven. It is not to be suffered, but the persons themselves are not excommunicated. This extreme discipline is alone applied in 1 Cor. 5 to the forms of wickedness there stated, yet it surely applies also in the case of fundamental evil affecting the doctrine of Christ.

The house of God which is the Church of the living God is the pillar and base of the truth. It follows that the local assembly, being representative in its place of the whole Church, must also have the character of being such a pillar and base. Hence the maintenance of practical holiness and

incorruptibility of doctrine is of vital importance. The assembly as acting for Christ and in obedience to the Word must judge evil.

Turning to John's Epistles we find the apostle combating the wicked teaching of men who have gone out from the Christian company (1 John 2:18, 19). In ch. 4:1-6 we have a more general statement, though the emphatic "they" of ver. 5 would include those already mentioned. It is more general because we are first instructed as to what characterizes the testimony of the Spirit of God in contrast to false spirits. The spirits here are the spirits of men either under the leading of God's Spirit or evil spirits. The latter work through men—"false prophets"—who have gone out into the world. They are of the class mentioned in 1 Tim. 4:1, 2. "But the Spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some shall apostatize from the faith, giving their mind to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy."* Again, Peter speaks of such (2 Pet. 2:1).

The Christian's responsibility is to "prove"† whatever is presented as testimony concerning Christ, to see whether it comes from the Spirit of God or evil spirits. The apostle then gives us the test. "Every spirit which confesses Jesus

* "The Spirit identifies the speaker and the evil spirit which speaks by him, as commonly in New Testament, and passes from one to another" (Footnote, *New Trans.*). Thus it is in 1 John 4:1-3.

† The necessity for this may arise within the Christian company, and in this connection it may be of interest to note this word. It is *dokimazo*. This, and *peirazo*, are two words in the New Testament meaning "to try," "test," "prove." The latter is used of the Jews, trying or tempting Christ (Mark 8:11; 10:1, etc.), and of Satan's temptations (Matt. 4:1, 3, etc.). The difference between the two words is on the whole this: the first, which is used in 1 John 4:1, commonly implies a good if not a friendly object; to prove or test in the hope that what is tried will stand the test; whereas the second implies a sinister object, to try in the hope that what is tried will be found wanting. (Substance of note in Cambridge Greek Testament.) I call attention to this as showing the spirit in which Christians are to prove things.

Christ come in flesh is of God." To this confession such spirits are led by the Spirit of God. Not to confess this foundation truth shows that the spirits which do not are under the power of the antichrist which in John's day was "already in the world" (vers. 2, 3). Then ver. 4 applies to all believers; ver. 5 refers to the whole number of false prophets, and would include those spoken of in 1 John 2: 19; ver. 6, where the "We" is emphatic in contrast to the "They" of ver. 5, refers to the apostles whose words Jude exhorts us to remember (Jude 17). We (all believers) now know the spirit of truth or error according as the apostolic teaching is received or rejected (end of ver. 6).

This at once helps us to understand the force of John's expression in his second epistle, "the doctrine of the Christ." It is what was from the beginning, as John speaks. In this connection, "Whosoever goes forward and abides not" in this doctrine means to advance beyond what is revealed in that body of truth called "the doctrine of the Christ." It is professing to have and teach what is an advancement on that doctrine. It does not refer to simply erroneous views concerning, or mistaken interpretations of, that doctrine itself, but to bringing in what would be called advanced teaching, additional revelations, found, for example, in Gnostic systems which adopted their own writings as the standard of truth, either minimizing or rejecting the apostolic testimony. Whosoever thus advanced did not abide,* and what that means is immediately stated. He "has not God." It is apostasy; such are apostates. The force of this is apparent from the opposite case. He that abides has both the Father and the Son. Not to have God means not to have Him as one's own God. There is no spiritual relationship

* This expression implies they had professed to abide or dwell in the doctrine, but by going forward they have ceased to do so. Of such it would be said, they have not continued in the faith, that is, in full assurance, of heart in the gospel (Col. 1: 23, *New Trans.*). They apostatize (1 Tim. 4: 1, *New Trans.*).

existing such as John teaches is true of the one who abides in the doctrine. Compare also 1 John 4: 15.

Now follows the apostle's instruction. "If any one come to you and bring not this doctrine." Such a person would be one who had gone forward, and by so doing did not abide in the doctrine. He would come teaching his advanced views, the newer and higher revelations as he might claim them to be, superseding what was from the beginning. Such were those mentioned in 1 John 2: 19. Once in the Christian company, they went out of it into the world, not being "of us," but "of the world," and being "not of God" they have "not God." Trading on past associations they might seek to return and practise their wicked works. If they came to this Christian woman's house, she is told what to do.

Here, then, John speaks of a specific class of persons who have gone out of the Christian company. This is the force of "gone out into the world" (2 John 7). They are "deceivers" led by that power of antichrist which characterizes the world, and which as the spirit of error energizes the denial of "Jesus Christ come in flesh." In speaking of these false teachers John uses these condemnatory names: liars (1 John 2: 22); seducers (2: 26); false prophets (4: 1); deceivers (2 John 7); antichrists (1 John 2: 18, 22; 4: 3; 2 John 7).

The characteristic feature of this spirit of error which John resists is stated to be the refusal to confess "Jesus Christ come in flesh" (4: 2)—"They do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh" (2 John 7). We need to apprehend the meaning of these statements, and others of a kindred nature used by John.* What is denied is the truth of *who*

* The following may help us to apprehend the force of these expressions. They are similar, but in the first the perfect tense is used which signifies the action as complete in itself and continuous in its effect. He is come and abides in the flesh. As to the second, the A.V. rendering ("*is come*") of *erchomenon* is not quite accurate; nor does the R.V. ("*cometh*") seem to be more than a partial correction. Rather read it, "that confess not Jesus Christ *as coming* in flesh," or possibly, "that confess not Jesus *as Christ coming*

the Person was that came, and that He came in that manner stated, *in flesh*—"The Word became flesh." He was truly and fully a real Man, though blessedly unique—God over all blessed forever and the Man Christ Jesus.

in flesh." Here it is not the perfect, but the present participle. It speaks "not as to the time, but the character of His coming" (J. N. D.). These deceivers denied not merely the fact of the incarnation, but its possibility. In both passages A. V. and R. V. translate as if we had the infinitive mood instead of the participle. The difference is, that with the participle the denial is directed against the *Person*, 'they deny *Jesus*'; with the infinite it is, directed against the *fact*, 'they deny that He *cometh*,' or '*has come*.' (Adapted from *Cambridge Greek Testament*.).

These deceivers may not have denied the historical fact of His birth, but they did not confess the truth of the Person coming or come in flesh. They denied the wondrous truth that He who was the Son of God from all eternity did so come—that is "*in flesh*." He was in *reality*, a man. He did not come as an angel, nor appear a man in phantasm, not in truth (*Docetic error*). He had a corporeal body, natural not spiritual. Further, note it is not said '*come into the flesh*,' but '*in flesh*.' Christ did not descend (as Cerinthus said, a contemporary of the apostle John) into an already existing man, but He came in human nature; He '*became flesh*.' This means that He came as truly a man as I am in component parts and experiences incident to human life, "*apart from sin*," as Scripture conclusively teaches.

It may be well to epitomize John's three great declarations of truth regarding our blessed Lord.

(a) "*Jesus is the Christ*" (2: 22). He asserts this against any holding the error that while Jesus—a real man—was visibly active in the work of redemption this was but deceptive appearance, the work being actually performed by a distinct personality, Christ, who entered the son of Joseph and Mary at the baptism and withdrew before the crucifixion. John says, not the Christ was in Jesus, but "*Jesus is the Christ*."

(b) "*Jesus Christ come in flesh*" (4: 2). He asserts this against any holding the forms of Docetic error—that of claiming the Saviour to be without birth, without body, and without figure. He appeared a man in phantasm.

(c) "*Jesus is the Son of God*" (4: 15). This he declares against the denial of His deity by such as the Ebionite teachers. They rejected the Virgin birth, and considered Jesus to be the son of Joseph and Mary by human generation, so that to them He was a mere man, a descendant of David, but not the Son of God. They refused any thought of pre-

In all that we have considered the question is not that of erroneous elements mixed with the faith of some persons, which though giving reason to exercise vigilance and care, need not hinder our walking with them. It is rather what entirely subverts the truth of Christianity in relation to the Person of Christ, as on the one hand, the denial of His deity, and on the other of His *real* humanity, either making the Lord a mere man, son of human parents, or when admitting divinity in some form, denying *reality* to His manhood, making it only *apparent*. In the light of such wicked errors we see how important it is to have the Gospels and John's Epistles.

What these deceivers would not confess, and the going forward,* and not bringing the doctrine of which John speaks, is not the fault, however serious, of having erroneous thoughts mixed with one's faith, the making of wrong distinctions, or wrongly putting things together; it is going beyond the doctrine itself by adopting the speculations of human wisdom of the nature we have defined, which are in fact, of Satanic invention, so as to distort, deny, or even discard the doctrine. Then what is brought is not the doctrine at all.

existence or divinity in connection with Him, allowing only that He was endued with power to fulfil His mission as Messiah, as the Christ, at His baptism. John calls Him "the Son of the Father" (2 Epistle, ver. 3), and ch. 2: 22, 23 shows the bearing of Ebionite heresy. "He is the true God and eternal life" (5: 20).

John then assures us that "whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (4: 15), and, "Everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God" (5: 1), and, "Every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God" (4: 2).

* In 2 John 7, 9, in the expressions, "Who confess not" and "whosoever goeth forward," we have the important construction of the article with participle. This describes the character of this class of deceivers, and does not merely assert a definite fact concerning them. Again, the present participle in both these passages indicates what is habitual: not a transitory conviction, but a permanent attitude. This construction is almost a substantive, characterizing the person or thing.

Thus one may err in interpreting different parts or features of the doctrine, while not introducing what is foreign to it, such as the vain and wicked speculations which John combated, but such do not come under the ban of his second epistle. One may hold firmly to the deity of Jesus, to the fact that Jesus is the Christ, and that He was a real man, not an appearance, a phantom, but that He came in flesh, and yet fall into error in teaching as to the humanity because he allows his reason to guide his thoughts in an attempt to explain what cannot be explained, rather than simply allowing Scripture to rule, bowing to its statements whether he can reconcile them or not in his own mind. Thus a teacher, while sincerely holding the great foundation truths as to the Lord's Person and work, may teach error as to the humanity of the Lord because he attempts to explain the mystery of the Person. In doing this he leaves the solid footing which Scripture gives to fall into the quagmire of human reason. Yet it is impossible to say such a man "has not God," or is a deceiver, or does not bring the doctrine of Christ as John speaks. Certainly such a person would need to be convicted of his error from the Word, and every effort made to deliver him from the snare into which he has fallen. If obdurate, he must be rejected as a teacher, while constant watchfulness would need to be exercised toward him and any seeming to be affected by his teaching. This would be necessary as showing care for the Lord's Name, the welfare of saints, the preservation of the Truth.

But if one in the Christian company rises up and brings such teaching as John denounces, how is he to be treated? First, remember that John speaks of a specific class, some of whom having gone forward had gone out from the Christian company, which held the wicked teachings that the apostle resisted. His instruction applied to all such in his day and applies still to whosoever, or every one, at any time, who follows the lead of such deceivers, thus not bringing the doctrine of Christ. Should one in the assembly bring out similar teaching, our first service would be to diligently

enquire into the matter. Since it would appear that he had become ensnared by the spirit of error, we are to labor for his deliverance. Compare 2 Tim. 2: 23-26; Deut. 13, and 17: 2-7. Procedure such as Matt. 18 prescribes would be in order. If, as a result of investigation, such fundamental error as John refers to is established and held to, so that it becomes evident that the person does not bring the doctrine of Christ, persistently adhering to such evil teaching, he marks himself as a worker of wickedness in this matter (2 John 11). As such he falls into the category of 1 Cor. 5, which enjoins us to remove the wicked person from among ourselves.

Thus let us remember that not to bring the doctrine of Christ does not mean to fall into error as to certain things within the limits of that revealed body of truth received once for all, but to bring what is outside its limits, though this may be accompanied with the attempt to identify such foreign elements with the truth itself.

VI

The Evil of Faction

In relation to this three terms are found in Scripture.:

First, *schisma*, rendered as "divisions" in 1 Cor. 1: 10; 11: 18; and "schism" in 12: 25. Compare also John 7: 43; 9: 16; 10: 19, "division;" and in Matt. 9: 16; Mark 2: 21, "the rent is made worse."

Second, *haeresis*, rendered "heresies" in 1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5: 20, and 2 Pet. 2: 1. It is "sect" in Acts 5: 17, 15; 5, 24: 5, 26: 5, 28: 22; and once "heresy" in 24: 14.

Third, *dichostasia*, rendered "divisions" in Rom. 16: 17; 1 Cor. 3: 3,* and "seditions" in Gal. 5: 20 where it just precedes "heresies."

* Omitted in the New Trans., and R. V.

The first and second words are distinguished in the statement, "I hear that there are divisions (schisms) among you . . . for there must be also heresies (sects) among you" (1 Cor. 11: 18, 19). In 1 Cor. 1: 10 the apostle beseeches that there be "no schisms among you." These were formed by setting up one against another, as Paul against Apollos, according to their fleshly preference. This was totally contrary to God's order. He had tempered the Body together so that there might be no schism or division (1 Cor. 12: 24, 25). Therefore the spiritual way was to recognize that each had his place and work, whether Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, rendering to each due honor and care. Carnality, worldliness, rent the assembly by setting one against another, and this inevitably leads to the twos or threes, or more, acting together apart from others, because of a common fleshly preference. This is sin, and should be so judged, otherwise it will surely lead to heresies, or sects, parties, factions—the assembly breaking up into these, and then acting apart from one another, the unity is practically broken. This second term does not primarily mean heterodoxy, though those originating or adopting a party, if orthodox at first, may fall into destructive teaching. The danger lies in that such factions or parties are really formed around some chosen leader's own opinions. This is "that the approved may become manifest among you." A plain example is given in 1 John 2: 19, but this involved what was antichristian, as the context shows. With such a case we would link Peter's words, "False teachers, who shall bring in by the bye destructive heresies. . . and many shall follow their dissolute ways" (2 Pet. 2: 1-3).

Sects, or factions, though evidently formed within led to separation from the assembly. The force of the term is seen by its use in the Acts—"sect of the Sadducees," "sect of the Pharisees," "sect of the Nazarenes," "strictest sect of our religion." These stood out in distinct separation one from the other. For the Christian it is one of the works of the flesh, Gal. 5: 20. As already remarked it may have

no element of heterodoxy, but if one or more set up an opinion or judgment and make it their centre (in doing which fleshly heat and intolerance will play their part), Christ as the true Centre is forgotten, the Holy Spirit grieved, self-will rules; and God's Word is used according to its dictates. This may be the case as to discipline as well as doctrine when such become subjects of controversy. The one course which will save us from the danger of this evil is that already outlined.

The distinction to make between the two terms just considered is thus stated:

"*Schism* is a division within the assembly, while they all still abide in the same association as before, even if severed in thought or feeling through fleshly partiality or aversion. *Heresy*, in its ordinary scriptural application (not its ecclesiastical usage), means a party among the saints, separated from the rest in consequence of a still stronger following of their own will. A schism within if unjudged tends to a sect or party without, when on the one hand the approved become manifest, who reject these narrow and selfish ways, and on the other the party-man is self-condemned, as preferring his own particular views to the fellowship of all saints in the truth."

As to the treatment of one, or more, so acting, Titus 3: 10, 11 instructs us. "An heretical man after a first and second admonition have done with, knowing that such a one is perverted, and sins, being self-condemned." Heresy is really an advance on schism in that it is a going out of the assembly in order to justify the views of those so doing, or oppose others who differ. Therefore there is no question of excommunication, but of having done with such. It means avoidance. The same word is used of shunning old wives' fables (1 Tim. 4: 7), of younger widows (5: 11), and questions (2 Tim. 2: 23). As having gone out forming a party, or to join one, it could not be a question of putting away, although according to the seriousness of what was

involved or might develop it might be necessary for the assembly to make public its stand in the case.

This leaves the third term to be considered, as used in Rom. 16: 17. It means properly *a standing apart* and so, *disunion, dissension*; with this are linked "offences," or occasions of falling, things contrary to the doctrine, or teaching, we have learned. These statements aptly describe heresy and its effects. The same treatment is enjoined—"Turn away from" those so acting, go out of the way of such, for they deceive, practically lead astray. This must be the result when what they do is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

It seems clear that those referred to here, as also those mentioned in 1 John 2: 19, had gone out from the assembly, the latter doubtless a more serious case. All such are to be avoided, for to keep company with them would mean sooner or later disaffection and the danger of being caught in their deception.

I believe these are divine principles, not human expediency, and that they will bear the test of the Word. I believe they mark a plain scriptural path, in following which we shall blessedly prove that if with sincere and prayerful desire we seek for unity as well as righteousness, God in His grace will give both when the purpose of such exercise has been attained. Thus while never free from the necessity for dependence upon the Lord and the Holy Spirit, we may be free from the fear of being forced at any time, without adequate means of judgment, to take sides as to some local question of discipline, or some contention between assemblies arising therefrom. The Lord grant us both grace and wisdom to carry out the teaching of His perfect and holy Word.

VII

Additional Remarks on 1 Cor. 6

1 Cor. 6 shows that the Corinthians had been going before worldly tribunals to have their disputes judged. It was a shame in view of what they would do in a future day according to God's purpose—even judge the world and angels. Those marked out for such work, and knowing it to be their calling (for the apostle can reprove their wrong ways by appealing to it), ought most certainly to be able to judge the affairs of this life. Not to do so, but instead go before the "unjust" (ver. 1), "unbelievers" (ver. 6)—those as such having no standing before God and not in the assembly—witnessed to their carnal state, and so their shame, while it was "a fault" in them (or us) in the sense of loss or damage (ver. 7, *New Trans.*)*. Rather than follow such a course, it would be better for them to suffer. Evidently there were cases of brother defrauding brother, as ver. 8 states, "But ye (emphatic) do wrong, and defraud, and this your brethren." Such worldly evil soon manifests itself when saints fall into the state of these Corinthians.

But ver. 5 shows that such disputes are not to be brought before the assembly as such. It is a matter of the disputants finding at least one wise enough to decide between his brethren. The contrast in ver. 1—"Before the unjust, and not before the saints"—is not between worldly courts

* The word rendered "fault," *hettema*, occurring only here and in Rom. 11: 12 ("diminishing"), is of interest, since it denotes loss by reason of being defeated or vanquished in some way, and so impoverishment, deterioration. Does not this intimate that the Corinthians, having fallen under the power of fleshly and worldly ways, were in such an impoverished spiritual state, damaged by the influence at work among them, that they had suits between themselves? If they had been spiritual such a course would not have been followed.

and the assembly, but between going before the former and setting up one "wise" man, or more, as a tribunal to discern or judge between brethren, and thus going before the saints instead of unbelievers. If, as a result of this, a course of evil is uncovered which falls into the category of 1 Cor. 5, then of necessity it must be brought to the assembly, the full evidence submitted to it, and as under the responsibility to judge those "that are within" (1 Cor. 5: 12), it must exercise discipline as the Word enjoins.

In prosecuting their disputes before worldly courts, thus setting up the "unjust," even "unbelievers," as judges to decide between brethren, they but exposed their own shame to a hostile world. In fact they ought not to have such disputes, but if indeed they had judgments as to things of this life why did they consider them of such consequence? Rather were they of so small importance relatively that it would be better to set those of no account in the assembly to judge such matters than make the unjust and unbelievers of the worldly courts their arbitrators. The apostle so spoke to put them to shame, for their action was equivalent to saying, "There is not a wise man among us who can decide between his brethren," and yet they were to judge the world and angels! How miserably they had forgotten their place and calling as saints of God! Those to whom they appealed belonged to the world—the very world these same saints would one day judge. Such action manifested their impoverished spiritual state. It was their shame.

