

When to break fellowship #1

Hi all,

If Christians are known for anything, it is church splits and strife, backbiting and hypocrisy. This series is what scripture says when we can or should break off fellowship with one another...but those reasons do NOT include the following example:

A distraught pastor told me his story: In front of his pulpit on the platform was a small table with a nice lace doily, and on that doily was a chalice and bread plate. A few weeks after he became pastor he moved the small table off the platform to floor level, but still directly in front of the pulpit.

The result of immaturity

Evidently that table with chalice and bread plate had been there for years, donated by a family in the memory of their grandfather, one of the founding elders of that church. The resultant uproar caused a church split. That's right, two of the elders took nearly half the congregation to a store front where they set up their own pulpit with table and chalice on a doily in front of the pulpit just as 'it should be'.

Laying a foundation

There are reasons scripture gives for breaking fellowship with a believer, or one who claims to be a believer but doesn't live it, but it doesn't involve moving great grandfather's table from the platform. Yet before I get into what scripture says about when and how to break fellowship, let us lay a foundation so we can understand the context of the instructions.

#1 - Personal accountability to Christ - everything flows from or is traced to this

"For we must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ that every one may receive of things while done in this (earth) body, according to what he has done whether good or bad." II Corinthians 5:10

We are each personally accountable to God and will individually give account of our lives in Christ. This isn't a heaven or hell judgement, this is as it says, an accounting of what we did since we received Christ's great sacrifice and our new life in Him.

On that day we won't be able to put the blame on others. Not, 'The devil made me do it', nor 'I was bound by the curse of the generations', nor 'If so and so would have done right then I would have done right'. Nor will we be able to cover our true motives for something done in life - we will be as transparent as glass before Him.

Christ in us is greater than any demon, greater than any family curse, and empowers us to be able to do all things through Him who strengthens us. There is no greater One than He who lives within, therefore there are no excuses NOT to be an over-comer.

#2 - Each must prove (walk out) his own faith

Free will is a gift we must learn how to use, how to fight for, and how to live responsibly with.

"Let everyone prove his own life, and then he will have rejoicing in himself and not another. For every person shall bear his own burden..." Galatians 6:4-5

In Rome there was great dispute about what day to worship on, whether to be a vegetarian or meat eater, or whether to drink wine or not. Paul called those who said a particular day was the right one to worship on, and those who don't eat meat, and those who don't drink wine, 'weak in the faith'. BUT he said what each person does, they do unto the Lord, so don't judge one another on such personal choices.

Love walk - "Let him who eats all things not despise him who eats only vegetarian, and let not the vegetarian despise him who eats all things, for God has accepted each of them. Who are you to judge another man's (Jesus') servant? To his own Master he stands or falls...let every person be fully persuaded in his own mind...let us not judge one another, but let us judge this, whether you are putting a stumbling block in the way of (those weaker in faith).

I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him who esteems it unclean, it is unclean...but the kingdom of God is not in meat and drink; but righteousness and joy and the Holy Spirit, so that he who chooses one or the other still serves Christ, and is acceptable to God, and approved of men in their walk in Christ. Let us therefore follow after things which make for peace..." Romans 14:1-23

They had similar issues in Corinth over meat sacrificed to idols and then sold in the restaurants and meat markets situated around the temple. Some believers were convinced it was a sin to eat meat sacrificed to idols, yet others said essentially, a steak is a steak - I don't care where it came from.

Paul told them, "...we know that an idol is nothing, and that there is no other God but one...However, not every (Christian) has that knowledge, for some with conscience would eat it as something sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience being weak, is defiled. But meat doesn't make us better or worse towards God, just be sure the liberty you have in Christ isn't a stumbling block to those who are weak." I Corinthians 9:4-9

The point made over and over is that each of us must make personal choices about how we worship and what we eat and drink between us and the Lord. Each of us must prove, walk out, our own faith in Christ. Personal choices as above are not a reason to break fellowship with someone.

#3 - We are to seek peace

"Him that is weak in the faith receive, but not to the point of arguing over opinions."

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where we can build each other up."

"If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

"But you O man of God, flee these things (context is fleeing love of money) and follow after righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, patience, meekness."

"But foolish and stupid questions avoid, knowing that they do nothing but stir up strife and controversy."
Romans 14:1, 19, 12:18, I Timothy 6:11, II Timothy 2:23

#4 - If a person is in a mess, THEY are responsible for getting themselves out of it - not you

My name is not Holy Spirit. Neither is your name Holy Spirit. We aren't to convict a person of sin nor judge another person's motives. We ARE to judge the fruit of their lives.

Too many want everyone else to repent and change without turning the microscope on their own heart. They want to pick the splinter out of everyone else's eye while ignoring the log in theirs...hmmm...wonder who said that? (Matthew 7:3) They must first examine their own heart and motives before coming to anyone else.

If they are in strife, they must deal with their own heart, and not come to someone else to agree with their strife nor feel sorry for them: "In meekness instruct those who oppose themselves; if God perhaps will grant them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, so that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." II Timothy 2:25-26

You cannot help someone who is angry, in strife, hurt, complaining, or unhappy until and unless they acknowledge the truth. That truth is God's truth - not their version of why they feel like they do or did what they did, not their reasonings so you can understand better - the truth is 'I messed up' free from alibi's. Otherwise they are "...ever learning but never able to come to the acknowledging of the truth." II Timothy 3:7

Turn the cheek? If you try to be at peace, but they insist on being angry with you, that is their problem to work out. As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all. But we are to turn just that other cheek, not becoming a boxing bag. We are to walk 1 extra mile, not a marathon with a person.

We are to give 1 extra coat, not our whole wardrobe. Walking in love is not just giving a person a handout, but giving them a hand up. But if they won't stand on their own two feet, after offering that 1 extra cheek to slap, giving them that 1 extra coat, walking that 1 extra mile - they are on their own. Cut them off and let them stand on their own two feet, for you have done what you could do, and beyond. The rest is up to them.

As it pertains to strife, THEY are the only ones who can recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, and also note that a person in strife is taken captive by the devil AT HIS WILL. What a horrible place to be in - at the devil's mercy. Wow.

Next week the lifestyle and practical examples of what scripture describes as reasons to break fellowship. Stay tuned! Blessings,

John Fenn

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When to break fellowship #2

Hi all,

Last week I shared a foundational understanding of the faith and what each person's responsibility is. These included:

#1 - Being aware we will stand before Christ individually to give account of ourselves to the Lord.

#2 - We each must walk out or 'prove' our faith while not becoming critical of others.

#3 - We are to seek peace, but not to the extent we become a door mat, nor bring ourselves to ruin while bettering others.

#4 - A person must recover themselves from strife, immaturity in general - no one can do it for them.

Self-deception - 3 examples

Self-deception is knowing the Word but not doing it. Knowing what is right but refusing to do it.

#1 - For instance, the Word says if you don't work you don't eat. Not a problem for most, but some would rather play spiritual giant than doing the hard thing of getting a job and staying with the job even if they don't feel like it. It is a lot more fun and boosts the ego to spend hours in social media and talk of praying for people at the grocery store. Meanwhile, they are running out of food and are behind in bills.

So I ask: Do we break fellowship with the Christian who spiritualizes everything just because they would rather appear busy doing spiritual things more than working and being self-supporting?

#2 - The Word says not to forsake the gathering together of ourselves. So what about your friend who you call every Sunday morning to get them out of bed so they will go to church, knowing if you didn't call them they would not go to church? Is there a point, or at what point, do you stop playing Holy Spirit and break fellowship with them, letting them decide if they want to go to church or not?

#3 - The Word says to forgive as you stand praying. If you have 2 friends who aren't speaking to each other because of some offense each took, how long do you try to play matchmaker, running back and forth between them trying to get them to forgive? Do you finally break fellowship with both of them, throwing up your hands in disgust and sad you lost 2 friends?

What is our responsibility?

Each of these 3 are examples of people who know to do the Word, but refuse to do it. Is confronting the lazy overly spiritual friend about getting and keeping a solid job, and then not fellowshiping with them until they become self-supporting, the correct action?

What about stepping back from calling the friend Sunday morning, or urging 2 friends to forgive one another, is that stepping back from trying to help them grow up an act of breaking fellowship with them? And how do you feel with your own grief and sadness over their decisions as you watch them self-destruct?

Guilt trip

Can you be secure enough in yourself to know you did all you could do - you walked the extra mile but can't go another, turned the other cheek but can't let them abuse you, gave what you could of yourself but can't bring yourself to ruin or exhaustion? Can you be at peace with that?

The reason I ask is that before we deal with 'big reasons' the Word gives for breaking fellowship, if a person grew up being everyone's servant, or with condemnation to feel they are never doing enough so therefore they are not good enough, which means if someone goes to hell it is their fault, or if they grew up religious rather than Christian, they may think the Christian thing is to be a door mat, a punching bag, a soft-spine non-confrontational bowl of jello.

Some people are raised to think they are never right, can never assert themselves, and they think that is what being a Christian is. So for them the phrase 'breaking fellowship' means slip back into the darkness without making a ripple in a friend's life, even though they can see a person self-destruct before their eyes.

Where is the balance?

Go back to my 4 points from last week, listed at the start above. (Make these people aware of the following):

#1, Do these people know they are accountable first and foremost to the Lord for their lives? That they have a responsibility to Him because they've been bought with a very great price, and He expects them to do something with what He did for them? They are not their own, they were bought with a price, so grow up.

#2, Do they realize their faith is for them to walk out, and you can't be their Jesus. He must be their Source, not you. Do they realize you have bent over backwards for them, trying to get them to become self-sustaining, get them to church, get them to forgive? They must walk it out by themselves and Jesus.

#3, Do they realize you have tried and tried to find peace for them? Do they realize you have been a shoulder to cry on, a friend they could pour their wounded emotions out on, an ally urging them to do what is right?

#4, And lastly, do they realize they must recover themselves out of their situation? Does the hungry friend realize he is hungry now because 1 month ago when first laid off, he didn't get up the next morning and get a job? Does the lazy friend realize he or she must decide for themselves they want to fellowship and to worship God with other believers in that gathering we call 'church'? Do the friends in strife realize they must recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, that you can't do it for them?

When we step back and let a person grow up, that is a form of 'breaking fellowship'. Understanding this lays the groundwork for the 'big reasons' for breaking fellowship the Word lists.

Jesus broke fellowship with people - or did He?

Did you ever stop to realize the Lord did not chase after the Rich Young Ruler who turned down Jesus' invitation to become a disciple? Why didn't Jesus go after him? Why did He allow the fellowship with someone who obviously knew Him, end? (Matthew 19:16-22)

In Luke 9:57-62 a man wants to follow Jesus, but He tells him it is a life of travel with no home base. Another said 'yes', but requested permission to attend to his dead father. In that time a dead person was placed in a tomb and mourned 7 days, then they were mourned a full 30 days. Then after 1 year with the body now decomposed, their bones were collected and placed in an ossuary box and reburied.

Culture lesson detour - The rabbi's of Jesus' time taught (incorrectly) the decaying flesh was a means of atoning for one's sins, so the collection of their bones and reburial was another time of mourning, but on the day after interring the ossuary family was to rejoice, knowing (father) was now fully atoned, the mourning process now ended.

Most likely (my opinion) Jesus confronted this teaching because He responded 'Let the (spiritually) dead bury their dead.' It may have been understood as something like 'You have already given your father a proper burial, let the spiritually dead finish the process, for burying his bones won't mean anything as he is already dead. I've called you to preach Life, so be my disciple and tell the gospel of Life! (or something to that effect)

Another man wanted to follow Jesus but first wanted to say goodbye to family members. Jesus didn't run after any of these people - He went about His business.

Aside from the little culture lesson, my point is that we never see Jesus running after people to try to get them to meetings, nor offering anything more than an invitation to become a disciple. Even in John 6:66-67 after He spoke a hard to understand parable about eating His flesh and drinking His blood and many of His disciples left Him, He merely asked the 12, 'Will you also leave me?' He never ran after anyone.

And here is the proper perspective: When breaking fellowship with a believer, it must be understood that they have actually FIRST broken fellowship with the Lord in some area of their life. They walked away from doing the Word. Therefore if we must confront them or tell them they need to find another church or friend, it is because they have first broken fellowship with the Lord in some area(s) of their life.

To say it another way, if you walk that extra mile with your friend, but that is your limit by scripture, but they insist on staying in that sin, it is they who have moved, not you. They first broke it off with the Lord and then you by their refusal to be a doer of the Word. Any action you must take to enforce their decision, is merely a response to their sin, and therefore their fault and upon their heads before the Lord.

What we'll see next week is that breaking fellowship with someone is an act to preserve our own spiritual life, and/or the life of a body of believers. Just as Jesus refusing to chase after the Rich Young Ruler was also an act of preserving and protecting His own ministry and purpose in life, so it is with us. The man was welcome to join Jesus, but the Lord couldn't be distracted from His purpose in life. A good lesson for us, and that's where we'll pick it up next week.

Blessings,
John Fenn

2013-09-21

When to break fellowship #3

Hi all,

Last week I shared the perspective that breaking off fellowship with another Christian, if done correctly, is merely a response to THEIR breaking off fellowship with the Lord in some area of their life. Anything we must do in the natural to limit our contact with them is the unfortunate result of their actions.

What NOT to do

A woman who was a student at the Bible school where I was Director, came to me for advice. A family had left the church she attended and the pastor from the pulpit told everyone that family had demonic problems and he was forbidding anyone from talking to them, because it was not God's will that they leave his church.

She worked with the wife in that family and saw her every day. She wasn't aware of any demonic problems, but they had left the church due to constant pressure and infighting. The student told me she didn't feel right about what the pastor said, but still....she wondered. I told her to ignore her pastor, start looking for another church, and be the best friend she could be to that woman.

How many of us when involved with a church thought we had made life-long friends, only to discover after we leave the church our 'friend's want nothing to do with us - our 'friendship' was totally dependent on us going to the same church? How sad, and not necessarily a reason to break off fellowship.

Knock these off the list of reasons why

Over the last 2 weeks I've shared scripture that says it isn't right to break fellowship with someone over their belief in what day to worship, nor their diet or drink. And though it says we discuss opinions, the discussion should never become an argument, so differences of opinion aren't valid reasons though you may get to the point with someone all they want to do is push their 'pet' doctrine or argue - then for self-preservation you may have to limit contact.

Going back 1 and 2 weeks, the person we are considering breaking fellowship with has lost sight of the fact they are accountable first and foremost to the Lord. They forget they must prove their own faith, they lose sight of the fact we have attempted to be at peace with them, but not to the point we come to ruin, and they've lost sight of the fact they must recover themselves from their situation - we can try to help, but they must summon up the courage and backbone and take charge of their life, spiritual life and natural life.

If they won't do these things, we have to move on with our life. We can only run after them that 1 extra mile, only let them slap us 1 extra time, only give them 1 coat - for we too are accountable to the Lord, and we too must prove our own way, and we too must live in peace, and we too must recover ourselves out of our situations.

But what about the 'big reasons'?

Remember, I lead a house church network. But that is the exact context of the whole of the New Testament, for the writers of the New Testament were house church leaders, writing to people in house church, so the context of the New Testament must be understood from the living room perspective, not the auditorium.

So when Paul wrote I Corinthians 5 about how they should have dealt with the man having a sexual relationship with his step mother, it means that this man was sitting in Justus' house*, having meals together as house church does, having the Lord's Supper with everyone else - and they all knew of his sin but did not confront him. (*Acts 18:7)

Paul said "...and you are proud and arrogant! And you ought to be in sorrow and shame, until the man who has done this thing is removed from your fellowship and your midst! v2

Now THAT is a reason for breaking fellowship. But remember what I said last week about how Jesus handled people who wouldn't follow Him - He didn't run after them, and in fact it was they who stepped away from following Him. So any action the body would have to take would only be a confirming act of the stepping away from the Lord the person already did. Don't let them blame you for their own failings.

The man in I Corinthians 5 was evidently a Spirit-filled, tongue talking, water baptized, believer in Jesus - he just had a seriously dysfunctional family and an equally serious problem with lust. Sexual sin in particular is mentioned in scripture as a reason to break fellowship, in part, because it endangers everyone.

Why is this sin listed so often?

Paul went on to tell the Corinthians in the very next verses:

"I wrote you in my previous letter not to associate (closely and habitually) with unchaste (impure, sexually immoral) people. Not meaning of course that you must altogether shun the immoral people of this world, or the greedy graspers and cheats and thieves or idolaters, since otherwise you would need to get out of the world and human society altogether!"

But now I write to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of Christian if he is known to be guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater (whose soul is devoted to any object that usurps the place of God), or is a person with a foul tongue (railing, abusing, reviling, slandering), or is a drunkard or a swindler or a robber. No, you must not eat with such a person." I Corinthians 5:9-11 Amplified Version

The first instruction had to do with 'fornication'. I'll look at the other things he lists next week - verbally abusive, reviling, slandering, drunks, dishonest in business, and thieves.

Paul said to break fellowship with someone living in sexual sin. The reason I say living in that sin and not a one time or sporadic sin, is because the man in Corinth had an ongoing relationship with his step-mother, ongoing to the point the whole house church knew about it.

The word translated 'fornication' is mentioned 15 times in the KJV epistles as something believers should avoid. It is listed as a work of the flesh and a characteristic of an unsaved person and lifestyle. So why is 'fornication' so important that Paul and others say we should have no fellowship with someone in that sin?

The word 'fornication' in Greek is 'porneia' or ' pornos', and means 'illicit sexual intercourse'. Let me explain the difference between adultery and fornication. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus defined adultery as a fantasy, of the imagination and thought process. Fornication is the physical consummation of the imagination.

First century temple worship included the making of offerings to a god and then sealing the offering by having sex with a temple prostitute. If you wanted your livestock to make lots of baby sheep and goats, then you made a meat (animal) offering and had sex with a temple prostitute, hoping by your sex act to inspire the god to stir the animals to mate- the same went for blessing crops, a business deal you hoped would lead to increase, and so on. I go into more detail in my 'Jezebel Spirit' series it helps define what the 'Jezebel spirit' really is.

Paul directly addresses sex with temple prostitutes in I Corinthians 6:13-18: "Meats for the belly, the belly for meats. But God will destroy them both. The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord. And the Lord for the body. And God has raised up the Lord by His power, and will raise us up as well (to eternal life). Don't you know your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? God forbid. Don't you know he that is joined to a prostitute is one body? For two He said, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit."

Best case scenario

The act of sex is the physical consummation of a covenant made in the heart between a man and woman, and this covenant as all ancient covenants are, is witnessed by God (in other cultures other deities), so that a man and woman can't be 'married' to each other in heart until and unless that covenant of the heart is witnessed and sworn before God and/or His representative. That means every time a husband and wife have intercourse, it is a confirmation of the covenant in their hearts.

To commit that act with another person you aren't first in covenant with, not only messes with the head and heart, it is the act of breaking the covenant with your spouse - or Christ if a single person. The offended spouse may acknowledge the covenant is broken and file for divorce. The mystery of the covenant of heart and physical consummation of that covenant is a type of Christ and the church, now mystically united by the Spirit, but one day we will see Him and be in His presence physically.

So fornication for a Christian is a slap in the face of Jesus, a breaking of covenant with Him worthy of breaking fellowship with that person. For a Christian to commit fornication it means they have broken covenant with their spouse and/or their walk with God - and that is why Paul in I Corinthians 5, James and Peter and the apostles in Acts 15, and elsewhere say not to fellowship with someone living a life of regular fornication.

The solution for them is a repentance that acknowledges the 4 elements I have mentioned the last 2 weeks: They must realize they are accountable to Jesus, just them and Him. They must realize they must walk out, prove, their faith. They must realize we have tried to be at peace with them, but their decision to live in continued sin forces us in our relationship to acknowledge the truth of their walking away from the Lord in this area. And they must realize they alone must recover themselves out of this snare of the enemy.

If someone is struggling with porn, do we fellowship with them? If they harbor fantasies about a person in (house) church to the point that other person(s) feel uncomfortable around them? That is why Paul said to the Corinthians when they wouldn't deal with the man; Don't you know a little yeast leavens the whole lump of dough?

That person may have to be separated if their personal battles become manifest so other people feel uncomfortable by wandering eyes or suggestive talk - that is a reason to confront them with the 4 elements above. Remember, they have first stepped away from growth in the Lord in this, forcing you to take action you don't want to take, but merely a reflection of decisions they've already made.

They may need to stay away from (house) church for a time, perhaps some personal ministry with another man if it is a man with the problem, or a woman if it is a woman - some personal mentoring time through the week as they walk out repentance and deliverance from lust, adultery, fornication until the body as a whole feel comfortable once again having them in their midst.

I've run out of space this week...more next week!

Blessings,

John

2013-09-28

When to break fellowship #4

Hi all,

The body of Christ is expert in breaking fellowship over things they should have worked through, and failed miserably at breaking fellowship for reasons scripture actually addresses.

Knowing when and for what reason to break fellowship is the subject today. Loving someone in the Lord is an art, which means no 2 situations will be exactly alike, but there are core sins the NT mentions as reasons to break fellowship. Paul puts them together in a list in I Corinthians 5:11.

The list

"But I write to you not to keep company with anyone who is called a Christian if they are a fornicator, or greedy, or an idolater or abusive person, or a drunkard, or swindler (dishonest in business), with people like that, don't eat nor fellowship with." (v12-13: For what have we to do with those outside the body of Christ? Aren't we to judge those within (the body)? But those that are outside the body God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves that wicked person.")

We aren't to judge motives, but we are to judge the fruit of a person's life. I've previously identified the sin of fornication as sex outside of marriage. The context of Paul's writing was a man in the (house) church who had an ongoing sexual relationship with his step-mother. All the believers knew of it, yet no one confronted him about it, and Paul said that was wrong, for a lifestyle of unrepented fornication is a reason to separate.

'Greedy' - this word literally means 'eager to have more'. Think about the 'prosperity' teaching and how greed has entered into so many churches and the hearts of many believers, disguised as the blessing of God. People try to mix unholy spirits of greed/lust with the Holy Spirit and the result is erroneous teaching that appeals to the flesh and emotions rather than stirring people to deeper growth as individuals in Christ and developing Christ-like character.

'An idolater'. Idol worship in Paul's time often also involved having sex with temple prostitutes, but in general an idol is something a person is devoted to, that comes between that person and God. Paul lists idolatry right after greed with good reason. An idolater is someone who has elevated something or someone as more important than God. Not the occasional infatuation with a new car or new shoes or new friend, but someone who as a lifestyle holds the object of their devotion as most important in their life.

I had a friend who was very proud of his car. One day while driving it the Lord told him he was committing idolatry. He argued back that he had no shrines nor statues nor did he pray to the saints. The Lord simply replied: "You've put this car between us." He repented of pride in his car and submitted it to Him in his heart.

'An abusive person', which is the literal translation of the Greek. Paul doesn't define abuse, though 'one who reviles' is often used here. This would refer to verbal and mental/emotional abuse, with the implication that it could involve physical abuse.

I had to tell a man who beat his wife that he was not welcome at church. They had 5 children and he would beat his wife so badly it would take her nearly a month before the bruises would heal, yet neither I nor her friends could get her to leave him, nor would he repent; She refused to understand when he beat her he had broken the covenant of marriage as surely as if he had slept with another woman.

We tried to get her to go to a ministry that had a safe house, separating for awhile in the hope of bringing him to his senses and that he might seek counseling for his anger and abuse, but each refused. Sad, but I was right to break fellowship with him while embracing his family who were the victims of his violence.

'Drunkard'. This means 'to be drunk with wine, intoxicated.' Today we would define this as substance abuse, one who as a lifestyle or regularly gets drunk, on drugs, etc. We must walk in love towards those seeking to overcome such addictions and lifestyle, and the key seems to be whether these people are making progress in Christ towards overcoming their sins, or not. For those who call themselves Christian yet they make no effort to judge themselves, we are to turn away from, again, because they have refused to deal with it themselves.

'Swindler'. This word, 'harpax' in Greek, is from the root meaning, 'to seize, carry off by force'. In ancient times it described what we would call a grappling hook or snagging hook that is sometimes used by fisherman. It is the act of throwing out a hook to snag (someone) and reel them in. Thus, swindler, dishonest in business, a liar and deceiver. When you read of 'ravener' (wolves in sheep's clothing), it is this word. From those who make prey of others in church, business, or life - have no fellowship.

Again, all these sins are practiced by people who call themselves Christians, yet live a lifestyle or maintain habits exactly opposite all that is called God and Godly. These are people who have hardened their heart towards God in one particular area. They may say they love God and that can be true in some areas, but they protect this particular sin, refusing to judge themselves. From such Paul says break fellowship.

Weak Christianity would say for the sake of the part of their heart that loves God we should continue with them, but there comes a point you become an enabler of their sin, helping them continue in that sin. The man sleeping with his step-mother no doubt loved God in maybe 70% of his life and heart, but it was based on the 30% he refused to repent of, that they were to break fellowship. Paul said that sin would affect the whole church, so for the sake of others they had to break fellowship with the man.

Focusing on the 70% they love God and refusing to deal with the 30% that is potentially lethal to their spiritual and moral lives, is like a physically abused wife of an alcoholic refusing to protect herself though she has been hospitalized due to her husband's beatings, because he is a good provider when he is sober. There comes a point you have to realize the person is using the 70% they say they love God to manipulate you to serve as they do, their 30% sin that is ruining their (and your) life.

But what if...

But what if you know of someone, or work for or with someone, or are married to someone, who fits one or more of these descriptions? What if you love them and want to work with them to overcome one or more of these sins? What is the point you end your involvement in their life in this area?

Let us look deeper into what happens after you've walked that extra mile in love, after you've been slapped that 2nd time, after you've given your resources but are now at a point you must protect what remains and go on with what God has called you to do.

Balance, balance

"And if he trespasses against you 7 times in a day, and 7 times in a day turns back to you and says, 'I repent', you shall forgive him." Luke 17:4 Note that's immediate repentance after the sin, which means this person is trying to overcome, and we are to respond with forgiveness in such a case.

But what if you are walking that extra mile with them and they exhibit false repentance (next week's subject) and insist on continuing in their sin, and you can walk no further? In Exodus 14:22 the Lord tells Israel they had sinned against him 10 times (over the course of about 13 months) since they left Egypt, and He was finally going to give them what they wanted.

Insert history lesson here: They got to the border of the Promised Land within 13 months after leaving Egypt. On the 10th rejection of His Word/Voice in Numbers 14:22, He allowed them to have what they said they wanted, to die in the wilderness, a process which took 40 years of wanderings. But the initial journey to the border of the Promised Land was no more than 13 months. (Covered in Exodus 14, through Numbers 14)

Israel had hardened their heart to the Lord - remember, on the outside they looked to be lovers of God and religious. These people made offerings through the priests, kept the Sabbath, kept the dietary laws and everything a good Jewish person would have done - but at each opportunity for growth in God, they refused. That is why after 10 times, God let them have what they wanted.

In Steven's final words in Acts 7, he summarizes that time frame in Israel and says in verse 42: "And God turned" (and gave them up to worship whatever they wanted). **And God turned.** The word 'turn' here,

'strepho', means "to turn the back to people" and is used to describe what God did to Israel after their 10th time in 13 months of unrepentant sin.

If you read Numbers 14:40-45, it was only AFTER that 10th time, AFTER God turned His back on them to give them what they wanted, that they 'repented'. And still, His decision was firm, He did not change His mind. That is the hard part when we love someone, to get to the point we can go no further, then have them cry and beg us to take them back, to let them live at home, to just help them out '1 more time'. But once the Lord had turned, He turned, and let them suffer the consequences of their sin.

How do we know the difference between genuine repentance and false repentance so that we can make such a decision? That's next week. Until then...(and remember to email me at cwowi@aol.com).

Blessings,
John Fenn
www.cwowi.org

2013-10-05

When to break fellowship #5

Hi all,

Breaking fellowship and repentance

The Rich Young Ruler came to Jesus asking, 'Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' The man's sin was lust and love for money and the status it brought him - but Jesus side-stepped the question and cut to who or what sat on the throne of his heart: "Why are you calling Me Good? No one is good but God." (In other words, 'Are you calling me God because you called Me good?')

The man didn't answer Jesus' question, so the Lord addressed his heart another way - "Sell all you have and come follow Me!" That forced the man to examine Jesus' question from another angle while exposing his true priorities: Is Jesus God or just a good man, and what do I love more; eternal life or money?

My point is that Jesus didn't focus on calling out that sin in his life - He simply went to the core issue of who is Jesus and what did he love most in life, money or God? Jesus still does this today for He never changes. When considering whether to break fellowship with a person, we must not get side-tracked on other issues, but need to look at the core issue in their life, and whether or not they are willing to change.

Repentance, or not?

The man in I Corinthians 5 who had a sexual relationship with his step-mother did in fact repent of his sin, which is acknowledged in II Corinthians 7. His desire for maturity in Christ was greater than his love of sex, to put it bluntly, and he repented of his sin and was restored to the fellowship of the saints.

There are 2 Greek words translated 'repent' or 'repentance'. The first is 'metanoeo', and means 'to perceive afterwards'. The root words are 'meta' - after, and 'noeo' and 'nous' - perceive and mind. It means to realize something after you've done it, with the implication you are changing your mind once you perceive it. This is used in the Bible of a true and Godly repentance.

The other word is 'metamelomai', from 'meta' - after, 'melo' - to care about/for, and it means 'regret'. This word is used to describe someone caught in the act and so they 'repent', or someone who's plan did not work out so they 'repent' - they are sorry, but only that their plan did not work out as they hoped. It is self-focused and revolves around the fact they got caught or their plan didn't work, so they regret that.

It is used of Judas in Matthew 27:3: "Then Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He was condemned, repented and brought the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders..." Judas didn't repent to God, he was sorry his plan to force Jesus to prove himself as God's Son didn't work out. Judas regretted within himself his plan failed, not to God.

David's true repentance

In II Samuel 12 David is confronted by Nathan about his relationship with Bathsheba, which was founded on lust, lies, and murder. David lusted for her when he saw her bathing, had her husband killed, and then covered it up. But David says in verse 13 when confronted: "I have sinned against the Lord."

If it was the false repentance of Judas, David would have said, 'I'm sorry my deception didn't work out' or 'Oops! You caught me and I'm so sorry.' But instead David realized the core of his heart, the core of the issue - "I have sinned against the Lord."

Thus true repentance is always the result of revelation. Revelation is what the whole kingdom of God works on, and this is revelation that what I did was at its core, against God. That is what we are looking for in someone who is on the verge of losing us as friends, losing our fellowship, being asked to attend another church, even losing their marriage - we are looking for Godly repentance founded upon a revelation from heaven of the true nature of their sin. We are looking for a spiritual 'light bulb' of revelation to click on where they suddenly say 'I get it'. And we are so sad when we only see Judas' type of repentance or none at all.

Repentance from revelation is the power of deliverance and the start down the path to wholeness

This is seen in David and Bathsheba's marriage, founded upon lust, lies, and murder, but by grace healed and resulting in Solomon! Solomon quotes his father through the first 9 chapters of Proverbs, and in 4:3-4 tells of the love of his father and mother for him - what a turn around in that marriage! But they had to go through the door of true repentance to attain the wholeness they sought. It is the same for us today.

As it relates to the person in our midst (house church/close fellowship) who is living in fornication, or a liar or dishonest in business or an addict or plants strife, we sometimes have to separate from them because there is no true repentance, there is no revelation in their heart that they are sinning against God. They may apologize they got caught, or regret how they hurt you, but that is what Judas did - even turning in the money so it looked all neat and tidy and genuine!

Paul described true repentance in II Corinthians 7: 10-11 as 'a Godly sorrow that won't be repented of'. He uses the 2nd repentance here, regret - meaning the person has revelation in his heart that it is a sin against God, which causes Godly sorrow, and once a person has that revelation and sorrow they will never regret that they repented, they will never regret serving God.

But what if...

What if they are like what Jesus described in Luke 17:4, they repent to you 7 times in a day, and Jesus said, 7 times in that day you will forgive him. Isn't each of those 7 times a false repentance? Maybe, but maybe that person is just working through the revelation and battling through their love of momentary pleasure of sin and their love of God.

For though he went away sorrowful the day Jesus invited him to become a disciple, very old church tradition says the Rich Young Ruler eventually did sell all he had to follow Jesus, which is seen in Acts 4:36-37 when he lays the proceeds at the apostle's feet and they rename him, Barnabus.

Hard heart?

If a person's heart is still pliable, workable, clay in the Master's hand, then they are working their way through the 7 times in a day of sin, repent, sin, repent process towards wholeness.

But if they harden their heart as the man who was having sex with his stepmother initially did, or we see only Judas' type of repentance, we must separate from them for our house church's sake or our own well-being.

The gifts and calling of God are without repentance - Romans 11:29

Oftentimes people will look at their lives and wonder if the call of God is still on them as in years past, or have years of the world and backsliding made it so that they have missed God completely. And Romans 11:29 is rightly used to say it is NOT too late, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

But there is a deeper truth in the Greek than what is translated in English. The word 'repentance' here is not David's type of repentance, like we would think when speaking of God. It is the false repentance of Judas that is used here, meaning regret.

What Paul is writing is this - The gifts and calling of God in you are things He will never be sorry His plans (in this life) for you didn't work out. He will never regret within Himself He called you and gave you gifts. He will never be sorry or regret within Himself that He invested His Son in you. He will never, ever, regret creating you or gifting you or calling you. He invested in you for eternity, and He will never be sorry for that - wow!

Next week, how to receive revelation that leads to true repentance.

Blessings,
John Fenn
2013-10-12

Breaking fellowship #6

Hi all,

I began this series saying Christians often break fellowship for wrong reasons while ignoring the actual reasons given in scripture. Many of us have had friends drop us like radioactive waste when we changed churches or did the slightest thing to offend them, leaving us clueless as to what we did wrong!

Confusion in the body of Christ

Let us not forget people who refuse to break fellowship when they should: They stay loyal to a minister after he divorces his wife and mother of their children to marry their nanny and is right back in the pulpit after the honeymoon. Or they remain loyal to the pastor who weekly manipulates their hard earned money out of their pockets to line his own, or the pastor who creates a church culture so toxic that if anyone raises the slightest question about anything, they are the ones accused of having a demon.

I want to teach the Word in context. So I don't want anyone to think Paul's list of habitual sins in I Corinthians 5 that qualify as reasons to break fellowship includes family members, co-workers, is license for divorce, or other situations outside the context in which he was writing.

Not talking kids and workplace situations

He was not sharing (nor was I) about adult children who once walked with the Lord but are now living in one or more of those various sins, nor was he talking about co-workers at the job.

For co-workers, you were hired to work, not witness or discuss spiritual things, so work. They aren't persecuting you, they just want you to do what you were hired to do; work. Paul said to work not with eye service as a man-pleaser, but unto the Lord who sees and knows all. Let your witness be your quality work.

For adult children I will suggest this; They know they are living in sin, or are an addict, and that you are praying for them. They don't need mom and dad expressing their disapproval every time you see them, nor do they need to hear a sermon. What they need is for you to be mom and dad. Romans 2:4 says, 'Do you not know it is the goodness of God that leads to repentance.' Show them God's goodness in you.

Let them see the Lord's faithfulness in your life, and talk wisdom to them. Help them make right decisions, and know that none of their behavior caught the Lord by surprise. Pray for them what Paul prayed, and I pray this for myself regularly, according to Ephesians 1:17-18 and Colossians 1:9 - that they may receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in Him, that the eyes of their understanding would be opened, that they may be filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

The good news is the man repented

There is good news with the man of I Corinthians 5. You'll recall he had an ongoing sexual relationship with his step-mother, Paul pronounced judgment on him and turned him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh for an early death so he would be saved - but he repented and was restored. Don't let that point be lost - after judgment was pronounced, he repented and it was accepted. So what indicates a true repentance?

Paul says in II Corinthians 7:8 of the effect of his first letter to them: "Though the letter caused you sorrow I do not regret it, though I did a little for I see it caused you grief and sorrow, though only for a little while."

He said he caused them 'grief' or 'sorrow', which is the Greek word 'lupe'. the Amplified Version says 'pain'. This is not just emotional pain and grief, but deeper, spiritual grief. It may take a sharp, confrontational word to them, as Paul's letter was, that caused the 'wake up' moment.

Godly grief

II Corinthians 7:9 continues: "I am glad now, not that you were pained, but that you were pained to repentance, for you felt a grief that God meant for you to feel, so that you might not suffer any loss..."

Godly grief and repentance is all about God and draws us to Him. False repentance is focused on self keeps a person from God. There is a Godly sorrow and that draws us to Him which allows us to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need - restoration. It is a healthy part of repentance.

And the next verse defines it even more: "For godly grief and the pain God is permitted to direct, produce a repentance that leads and contributes to salvation and deliverance from evil, and it never brings regret. But worldly grief is deadly (the hopeless sorrow characteristic of the pagan world)." (Amplified Version)

The people we must break fellowship with need to experience a Godly pain of the heart which directs them to Him. God is permitted to direct a godly sorrow because our hearts are turned to Him to give Him that permission. Have they given the Lord permission to deal with them on this subject? Have they experienced that grief God wants them to experience? David did. The man and the congregation of I Corinthians 5 did.

Experience the Holy Spirit, or knowing God?

Because true repentance flows from this revelation from God that we have sinned, I wonder if because so many churches provide a church experience instead of a God experience, people learn church-based repentance and formula repentance rather than a heavenly revelation based repentance the Bible describes.

People are trained to go to an auditorium to experience God rather than first experiencing God through the week in their personal lives. A whole congregation following a "Pray this prayer after me" instruction has become 'repentance'. They are trained to experience God corporately through worship or teaching, but once they walk out that door they don't know Him individually - they only know His presence corporately.

Because sin is personal between the human heart and God, the auditorium can offer little help as they try to battle sin. Repentance requires a person to pray their own prayer from their heart, not follow someone else's idea of what they think a person's heart should express.

As a result, millions of Christians are stuck powerless in a love/hate relationship with themselves and God wondering why He won't deliver them, ignorant that the power over their sin flows from revelation of the Father on a personal basis, not on a corporate basis.

If not corporate anointing, then...

I've seen people come forward week after week to altar calls yet are nothing bettered. Some years ago I began discreetly asking a few about their lives and found a common trait - each came forward expecting the pastor (prophet, teacher) to lay hands on them and if they kept coming forward, one day, Lord willing, hopefully, if the anointing is heavy enough and there is an open heaven that night, and the pastor holds his tongue just right, God will touch them and deliver them.

This culture of 'someone laying hands on me is the key to my breakthrough' is in contrast to scripture. Repentance is the first word of salvation. Hebrews 6:1 lists repentance as the first characteristic of the foundation of faith. Has the seeker friendly, politically correct, don't pressure anyone, and don't mention 'sin', culture robbed people of a true salvation experience involving repentance?

We were created sovereign beings which means neither God nor the devil are able to make us do anything. Many in the body of Christ need to find backbone, find determination, and stop waiting for some anointed magic beans to solve their sin problem, and just repent. Often though, they love their sin more than our presence in their lives, and would rather stay in sin than seek God with their whole heart.

It's always harder work to seek God than seek sin. The standard life line the church throws to people in need of repentance is, 'Come back next week and hear the message' (or the guest speaker) because many pastors have lost or never had in their own lives the knowledge of how to seek God, so can't lead others.

Just talk to Him from your innermost heart

Again, for many in the body of Christ, they know how to pray corporately, worship corporately, receive teaching corporately, even repent corporately.

But they don't know how to just talk to the Father conversationally one on one (nor repent on a one to one basis). Find reasons to talk to Him - tell Him of the beautiful morning, on the great timing of something good in your life, and of that issue you are struggling with. Don't get into the habit of you and He struggling with a sin yet never actually talking to Him about it - be blunt, be honest - He can handle it. He has invested in you for the long haul - eternity.

He knew of our struggles at this time before He even created the world, yet Jesus still died for us. He not only loves you, He likes you. Wow. Once you share your heart to Him openly and honestly, be quiet, and let Him share His heart openly and honestly with you, which may take weeks or months. Walk with Him in that. That revelation leads to a repentance that will never be regretted, and will draw you closer to Him than you ever have been before.

Blessings,

John Fenn

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