

Eating with Family Members Who Have Been Withdrawn From

By Paul R. Blake

- A. Not preaching on the following:
 - 1. The command for local church discipline
 - 2. How to practice withdrawing fellowship
 - 3. Who should be disciplined and why they should be disciplined
- B. We are going to study the uncomfortable and somewhat controversial subject of eating with family members who have been withdrawn from.
 - 1. Some have considered this an eccentric scruple of conscience
 - 2. Some do not believe this command is in the Bible
 - 3. Some believe they do not have to keep this command.
 - 4. Some try to rationalize their way out of keeping this command.
- C. We will examine the following questions:
 - 1. What does the word of God say?
 - 2. Can we understand what God has said?
 - 3. In what scriptural circumstances is one excused from the command?
 - 4. What happens when a follower of God puts family before God's will?
 - 5. Can one make an objection to keeping God's command that He will accept on Judgment Day?

I. WHAT DOES THE WORD OF GOD SAY?

A. All translations of the scriptures available to me (13) say essentially the same thing: do not eat with a brother in sin and under the discipline of the 1Corinthians 5:11 context. This is a matter of doctrine and not a scruple of conscience.

King James Version - "with such an one no not to eat"

New King James Version - "not even to eat with such a person."

American Standard Version - "with such a one no, not to eat."

New American Standard Bible - "not even to eat with such a one."

Revised Standard Version - "not even to eat with such a one."

World English Bible - "Don't even eat with such a person."

Weymouth New Testament - "With such a man you ought not even to eat."

Modern King James Version - "with such a one not to eat."

Bible in Basic English - "nor take food with him."

Contemporary English Version - "Don't even eat with them!"

Young's Literal Translation - "with such a one not even to eat together"

Montgomery's New Testament - "No, with such persons do not even sit at table."

Darby's Translation - "with such a one not even to eat."

II. CAN WE UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD HAS SAID?

A. All commentaries available to me (10), written both by brethren and by denominationalists agree. We are not to eat with erring Christians under discipline. It is evident that this is a clear matter of doctrine and not a scruple of conscience.

B. J. W. McGarvey - "Have no interchange of hospitality which would imply brotherly recognition, lest the church should thereby not only be disgraced, but corrupted."

C. Michael Willis (Truth Commentaries) - "Church discipline is social ostracism; therefore, it is effective or ineffective in direct proportion to how well the members personally disassociate themselves from the sinner. If the congregation, as a body, withdraws from a brother but individually the members continue to associate with the brother, the disfellowshipping will not be effective. The prohibition against social intermingling is further defined to include not eating with the rebellious brother. To sit down together to enjoy a meal implies that one condones the actions of the other. By refusing this type of association with a brother, his conduct is being disapproved and he is being rebuked. Again, I should add that no animosity is intended in such a withdrawal of fellowship. The withdrawal should not be done with vengeance but with the intention of saving his soul. Any Christian who ignores this commandment of God and associates with those from whom the church has withdrawn should be disciplined himself."

D. Eerdman's Pulpit Commentary - "The reasons for this prohibition are obvious. (1) It could scarcely be other than injurious to our own moral nature to be intimate with those whose life belies their creed, whose hypocrisy is unmistakable. (2) Such intimacy would be interpreted by the world as meaning that in our esteem it is of little consequence what a man is, if he only professes to be Christ's. (3) And there can be no question that to cultivate the friendship of a hypocrite would tend to encourage him in his sinful courses whilst to withdraw from his society might lead him to repentance.

Until he repents, we are not to have fellowship with him, not even to eat with him, but to show him by our conduct what has been expressed in the Church's decree that he is separated until repentance. If this were not so: 1. The force of Church discipline would be seriously weakened. It would become largely unmeaning. It would be very idle, as well as scandalously contradictory, to cut off from fellowship and to admit to it at the same time. 2. The effect upon the offender would be lessened. Church discipline does not lose sight of his welfare; it is directed towards his recovery and restoration. But if it is to produce this effect it must be felt. It cannot be felt if practically it is destroyed. 3. It would seem as though the evil were lightly esteemed. This would bring a great scandal upon Christianity. It would not only expose it to contempt, but justify contempt. 4. There would be much peril to the other members of the Church. We may not have fellowship: (1) for our own sake; (2) for such friends' sake; (3) for the sake of others who may observe our friendship, and, above all, (4) for Christ's sake, who said, through his servant, 'Come out from among them, . . . and touch not the unclean thing, and will receive you.'

E. Albert Barnes - "not to do anything that would seem to acknowledge him as a brother; with such an one not even to eat at the same table. A similar course is enjoined by John (2John 1:10-11). This refers to the course of common life. The true Christian was wholly to disown such a person, and not to do anything that would seem to imply that he regarded him as a Christian brother. This is required in keeping the church pure, and of not doing anything that would seem to imply that Christians were the patrons and friends of the intemperate and the wicked."

F. Adam Clarke - "You must not even thus far acknowledge a man professing Christianity, who is scandalous in his conduct. Let him have this extra mark of your abhorrence of all sin; and let the world see that the Church does not tolerate iniquity."

G. Jamieson-Faussett-Brown - "no not to eat--not to sit at the same table with such; whether at the love-feasts or in private course"

H. Matthew Henry - "Therefore on this occasion he tells them that they should not keep company with him, nor so much as eat with such a one. They were to avoid all familiarity with him; they were to have no commerce with him: but, that they might shame him, and bring him to repentance, must disclaim and shun him.

I. Robertson's NT Word Pictures - "Associative instrumental case of *toioutôi* after *sunesthiein*, "not even to eat with such a one." Social contacts with such "a brother" are forbidden."

J. Gill - "But his sense was, that they should keep no company with persons guilty of the sins mentioned, who bore the name of Christian brethren, and were members of the same church; and indeed, so much familiarity with them should not be indulged, as even to eat with them"

People's New Testament Commentary - "Church members must not have social intercourse with one who has been a member who is guilty of the grievous sins named."

III. IN WHAT SCRIPTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES IS ONE EXCUSED FROM THE COMMAND?

A. Note that the assembled church is the body addressed in 1Corinthians 5:

1 "among you"

2 "taken away from among you"

4 "when ye are gathered together"

6 "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

12 "them that are within"

13 "put away from among yourselves that wicked person"

Is Paul speaking to local churches or individual families? Obviously, he is addressing the local church. One might object by saying "But my son in the flesh is also my brother in Christ." Yet, that does not alter the fact that 1Corinthian 5 instructions are for the local church to carry out as an assembled body for the benefit of the local church

Families are separate institutions, governed differently than the local church, and endowed with different responsibilities. Parents are to love, nurture, and provide for their children. Children are to respect and obey their parents. Husbands and wives are to dwell together in intimate communication with one another. The command to withdraw fellowship does not supersede nor make invalid our duties in the home; nor does fulfilling our duties at home imply fellowship or brotherly recognition and endorsement. Familial relationships in the home do not denote, connote, nor otherwise imply spiritual fellowship in the body of Christ. It is true that if a Christian fails to discharge his duties properly at home, he will lose his fellowship with God. However, one's relationship in the home is based upon his responsibilities to the home. His duties in the home are distinct from his fellowship in the church unless and until he fails in his duties at home.

Likewise one's duties in the local church are not limited by his duties in the home. Can a wife justify forsaking the assembling because her husband demands it? Similarly, decisions made in the local church cannot require that Christians violate God's instructions to them for the care of their spouses and children. A local church cannot require men to assemble so frequently and for so long, that they are unable to work and support their families.

Where does one draw the line in the home? All Bible students agree that social interaction implies fellowship. Do parents take the withdrawn from children on vacation?

Do they attend their children's school functions? Does the wife of a withdrawn from man cohabit with him? Does a child take care of an elderly withdrawn from parent? If social interaction implies fellowship, and any activity in the home can be considered social interaction, then any interaction in the home is forbidden. It becomes clear at this point that local church discipline does not apply to all of one's relationships and responsibilities in the home.

In addition, one cannot limit the forbidden contact to eating only. Paul said in 1Corinthians 5:9 that they were "not to company with" the unrepentant, sinning brethren. Therefore, forbidden social contact is not limited to eating only. No one is prepared to carry the matter this far. Yet if one is going to advocate that he cannot eat with his withdrawn from spouse, then consistency demands that he not have any other social contact with her, too.

The Amish practice an extreme form of this isolation of the disciplined called "shunning"; the Mennonites call it "the ban." They not only refuse to eat with the shunned, but they also refuse to speak to them or have any contact with them except to teach them to repent. This is more in keeping with 2Thessalonians 3. However, they mistakenly apply it to the family.

However, there are limits to which withdrawn from family members one can eat with. One is limited to eating with only those to whom he has scriptural responsibilities. Parents are responsible to raise their children. When the children are raised, that duty ends and there are no commands to be neglected. If they eat with the children after they leave home forming their own households, then 1Corinthians 5:11 has been violated. A child is required to "requite" aged, infirm parents. The command exists WHEN his parents become aged and infirm. If there is no condition of responsibility to be met, then one has no business socializing with the withdrawn from, even if they are blood kin. For example, what of one who is 40 has a withdrawn from fleshly brother who is five years older than himself? What duty does he have to him other than to admonish him to repent? None. Therefore, a social relationship with him is unjustified.

To simply claim family relationship is not a scriptural justification. The burden of proof falls to you to provide a clear passage of scripture to justify a social relationship. This is not opinion, application, or scruple; this is Bible authority. You must supply book, chapter and verse. Only where a clear command exists that directs Christians to maintain familial responsibilities may one eat with a withdrawn from family member.

IV. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A FOLLOWER OF GOD PUTS FAMILY BEFORE GOD'S WILL?

- A. 2Sam. 16-17 - Absalom shamed his father, plotted against the king, and lead a rebellion that thrust Israel into civil war that made the nation vulnerable to attack from outside enemies.
 - 1. David's answer - 2Sam. 18:5
 - 2. God's answer - 2Sam. 18:9-16
 - 3. David's response - 2Sam. 18:31-33, 19:1-4
 - 4. Joab's rebuke - 2Sam. 19:5-7
- B. Nothing good will ever come from putting family before the will of God.

V. CAN ONE MAKE AN OBJECTION TO KEEPING GOD'S COMMAND THAT HE WILL ACCEPT ON JUDGMENT DAY?

1. "I have never seen it (refusing to eat with disciplined members) do any good."
 - a. Personal experience is not an acceptable standard for authority. One could just as easily say that taking a stand against the institution did not do any good, since brethren are still firmly divided over it. We would not apply this standard to any other matter of revealed doctrine.
 - b. There are reasons why this has not worked in the past:
 - 1) The local church does not have a close relationship with the disciplined member so from his perspective nothing is lost by being withdrawn from
 - 2) The local church waits too long before discipline to the extent that the erring brother is gone too long to miss the break in fellowship
 - 3) Not all members of the local church practice the command to avoid eating with disciplined members, thus negating the effect of withdrawing fellowship
 - 4) Discipline is not practiced consistently. Partiality negates the effect of discipline and destroys the influence of elders
2. "I believe the disciplined person might come back to the faith if we eat with him."
 - a. This is the equivalent of saying, "Let us do evil that good may come." God did not tolerate it when King Saul brought back Agag and the animals for sacrifice. Certainly it is good to restore the erring, but it is not good to violate a clear instruction to do so. 1Sam. 15:13-23
 - b. I know of a lot of people we could baptize if we had dinners here at the building. I know of a lot of neighbors who would come to church here if we had a softball team
 - c. How many people could we reach under the guise of trying to teach them if we are willing to set aside clear commands of the Lord in order to do so?
3. "I know that what I am doing is not right, but please allow this to be."
 - a. When Samuel rebuked Saul for disregarding God's will, Saul acknowledged his sin, but asked Samuel to stand with him in the presence of the people to imply that nothing was wrong and so that he would not lose face. The correct way to handle error is to be humble and repent. 1Sam 15:24-30
4. "I know many faithful preachers, elders, and Christians who don't believe we need to keep this command."
 - a. All the more reason to hold ones self to a higher standard of behavior and to live above reproach. Our priorities are as follows:
 - First - we have a duty to the truth above all other considerations
Titus 1:9-16
 - Second - we have a duty to the local church to do all things for its spiritual well being before we consider our own personal interests
1Peter 5:1-4
 - Third - Our personal interests come after the first two priorities have been properly discharged
 - b. When faithful Christians choose to set aside this command of the Lord:
 - 1) They place family before the will of God
 - 2) They place family before the spiritual well being of the church

- 3) They set a poor example before the disciplined family member by laying aside a clear command
 - 4) Set up circumstances where conscientious brethren would believe they had been led to sin
 - 5) They increase the potential for disruption to the peace and unity of the congregation
 - 6) Increase the burden of faithful brethren who are endeavoring to keep the will of God in this matter
5. "People could sit at other tables and not eat with them."
- a. This is a sophistry. Proximity is not under consideration in 1 Corinthians 5; purpose, intention, and implication are at the heart of the matter. For example, if I were to encounter a disciplined Christian in a restaurant, I would not be eating with him. I did not purpose to eat with him; I have no intention to have social associations with him; and therefore, I am not implying to him or to others that we are in fellowship. However, in the incident under consideration there was purpose to have a social interaction, there was an intent to be with him in the eating of a meal. The implication to him and others is that we find it more important to show him affection and acceptance than to shame him as commanded by the Lord. That shame, as unpleasant as it feels to us and to others, is designed to teach (discipline) him.
 - b. One cannot purpose to attend such a function knowing that a disciplined member will be there and say he will not be eating with him. This is intellectually dishonest. The only circumstance where one would be guiltless in such matters is if he were not aware of his presence.

Conclusion:

- A. Matthew 10:37-38
- B. If you truly love the Lord and your disciplined family member, you will manifest this love to both of them by obeying the Lord's will in this matter. God knows what is best for both of you.
- C. Just as disciplining an erring child is unpleasant, but necessary to his well being, so is carefully practicing local church discipline uncomfortable, but also essential for the salvation of the erring brother.
- D. Do not undermine the discipline commanded by the Lord and render ineffective our efforts to restore the erring by ignoring this command.