

Suspended and Disfellowshipped

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung – 12/7/2013

Leviticus 19:

- 2** Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, **Ye shall be holy:** for I the Lord your God am holy.

God commands us to be a holy people. This is the basis on which the interventions of suspension and disfellowshipping are founded.

It is our duty to be holy – **set apart** for God's higher purposes.

God has made provision for us to be able to keep the congregations of the Lord sanctified for God's spiritual purposes.

When someone within our midst is found to be living a sinful life, we are obligated by God to take action.

We are not instructed by God to take **punitive** action – because it is not our obligation to **punish** sinners – but if at all possible – to **restore** them to God's good graces.

James says it very well. After all, we are our brother's keeper and the second function of the Church brethren – after loving God – is to put the spiritual **care and concern** of all the brethren first.

James 5:

- 19** Brethren, if any of you do **err from the truth**, and one convert him;
20 Let him know, that he which converts [turn him around] the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

Brethren, that is the responsibility – individually and also the collective obligation of the congregation to see to it that a wayward person is restored to holiness – and eventually attains to the Kingdom of God.

I like second titles: **The law of Christ.**

The **law of Christ** says that we must busy ourselves making sure that we are helping one another stay on the straight and narrow. Some people say "I don't stick my nose where it does not belong." That is the point: **The law of Christ** says that we have no choice but to become involved.

That is not "being a busybody," anymore than when a lifeguard intervenes and pulls you out of a rip tide and saves your life. It is like pulling someone out of a burning car – there is no prerogative except to **save** them if you are able. It should be that way with **spiritual problems** in the Church – we have got to help save those who have gotten out of sorts.

But in these last Laodicean days – the greater Church of God has gotten away from the **true practices** that were given by Christ and the Apostles to the first century brethren. Paul puts it this way:

Galatians 6:

- 1 Brethren, if a man be **overtaken in a fault**, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.
- 2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill **the law of Christ**.

I am addressing this question today because **the law of Christ** is not widely practiced in the Church of God.

The Law of Christ demands of us Christians that we do get involved and “**Bear one another's burdens.**” Jesus is speaking of laying down our lives spiritually in order to preserve another Christian.

Too many ministers are obsessed with **putting brethren out** of the Church – rather than endeavoring to **keep them in** the Church.

There is a strange phenomenon that has become an entrenched part of the culture of the Church. This trend existed to some degree when most of us were a part of the Worldwide Church of God organization. Surprisingly, today, with the Church widely scattered there remains a good sized segment of the brethren who are **fearful** of being “**put out**” of the Church.

People say to me, “If I ask my pastor why we aren’t doing such and such – I’m afraid he’ll put me out of the Church.” They will say to me, “Please do not let my name out – because if it gets back to my minister – I’ll be in big trouble.”

When someone complains to me about their local minister being abusive of someone in the congregation – and I ask them if their headquarters knows about it – they reply: “Headquarters always supports the **local man** – and if I said anything to them – I’d get disfellowshipped also.”

Sadly, it is **not** the lawbreakers or heretics who are afraid of being rejected, marked or disfellowshipped, it is the truth-seekers who are trying to find other true believers who have not let down and become lukewarm. These concerned brethren with valid questions are the ones most likely to arouse the ire of controlling ministers who suspect them of rebellion against their organization.

There is something inherently wrong with the membership being controlled and restrained by the means of **fear** tactics. We find the Biblical practices of suspension, and disfellowshipping in the Scriptures.

Those two interventions are very different. **Suspension** is one thing – and **disfellowshipping** someone is something else entirely. These two separate Biblical interventions have been misused and misunderstood to such an extent that today they are used interchangeably.

The two questions we should understand are these:

When is someone supposed to be **suspended**; and what is supposed to be achieved by **putting a member out** of the congregation like this?

Secondly and separately:

What would cause a person to be **marked** or disfellowshipped?

We will be looking at the answer to those two questions. Those who are living **Christian** lives should **never** be afraid of asking questions or standing for the truth. There **is** nothing to fear.

Brethren, please know this: Those who have been marked and disfellowshipped by corporate organizations for political reasons have **not** been removed from the Body of Christ.

Apostate ministers can kick you out of **their corporations** – but that action has no **negative effect** on your spiritual standing with God. There **is** nothing to fear.

We were warned by Jesus Christ that those who lived by **the Law of Christ** would be disfellowshipped – but woe to the perpetrators of those offenses. Jesus said:

John 16:

1 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended [scandalized].

Jesus says to expect it – if you are **truly getting involved** in holding up the Truth and bearing one another's spiritual burdens.

John 16:

2 They shall **put you out** of the synagogues [that is a meeting hall]: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever kills you will think that he doeth God service.

Okay, Jesus realizes that **being put out** can be a kind of scary proposition to face – so He adds some encouragement for us.

John 16:

3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

They do not know or practice **the Law of Christ**.

John 16:

4 But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.

Things are topsy-turvy in God's Church in these last days. Things are **upside down**. Instead of the corporations or colleges being the sole repository of right doctrine and Truth – it has fallen to the faithful brethren to also be defenders of the truth. It is often the dedicated brethren who are standing in the gap for doctrinal purity.

Jude

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should **earnestly contend** for the faith which was **once delivered** unto the **saints**.

God tells us in both the Old and New Testaments to be a holy people. God desires that His people be a **holy** people. What does that entail? How do we become holy and stay holy? What is it that sets us apart from the rest of humanity?

1 Peter 1:

14 As **obedient** children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

We were all unholy sinners before God called us. Notice: God is Holy, perfect, sinless, pure... We cannot come into His presence in that unholy sinful state.

1 Peter 1:

- 15 But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;
- 16 Because it is written, **Be ye holy; for I am holy.**
- 17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to **every man's work**, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:
- 18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;
- 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

We have been sanctified and redeemed by the blood of Christ – making us clean and holy. Being “holy” means that we should each be set apart from sin and uncleanness. We could not be reconciled back to God the Father until we were made **holy** by putting on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

We are supposed to be a Godly people. When a member is engaging in sin – he becomes unholy, and should not come among the holy, faithful brethren.

The Scriptures do not instruct us to **disfellowship** a brother or sister in this case, but to **suspend** their contact with the faithful brethren until such time as they repent of their ongoing sinfulness.

Let's examine the role of the congregation in enforcing God's directive in this situation as we are given example in 1 Corinthians 5. We will see how Paul shows not only how to handle the sinful situation – but also who is responsible for dealing with the terrible encroachment on the Church brethren. The Corinthian congregation was not mature or well developed spiritually. One of Paul's most important responsibilities before God was to promote the spiritual growth and development of the Church congregations that he pastored.

1 Corinthians 5:

- 1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

Even the Gentiles have some standards of civility. Paul explains how to handle a serious problem in the church. The problem was that everyone in the congregation knew about the sin – but no one did anything about it.

They said the usual things to themselves to justify not applying The Law of Christ – and getting involved to help their brother who was floundering in sin. They said things like, “Well, I used to be a sinner too, who am I to judge my brother?” That is plain out spiritual arrogance. Those brethren who were loving him in his sin – were costing him **his salvation**.

Some people put **social friendship** above God's will. "I just want to be friends." "I can overlook his sin – I have that much love for him." Brethren, loving someone **in their sin** is a Protestant love. That is what gives **God's love** a bad name. Here is the problem with that – God has said that He is not going to overlook sin – sin will be judged.

Our responsibility is to be our brother's keeper. He is headed in the way that will cost him his salvation. God has defined sin – God has **already judged** the matter. They were all unwilling to get involved to help their brother. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 5:

2 And ye are puffed up [prideful and arrogant], and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be **taken away** from among you.

You should have been sorrowful and sad and **put him out** of the Church. This is not unloving or harsh or uncaring on God's part – it is for the man's own good. That **suspension** is designed to save the sinner – to get him back in a right status with God and with the church.

Some want it both ways: sinning friends and church. Paul's judgment on the matter is the same as God's – this **unholy** man has no business coming among God's holy people. The sinner would only **corrupt** the entire congregation – which corruption was already beginning – just like one rotten apple spoils the whole barrel.

1 Corinthians 5:

3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

In this epistle, Paul did not address this problem on account of the immoral man, or his father, whom he had so grievously wronged. If you read Leviticus 18:8 you will see that God specifically forbids that relationship.

Leviticus 18:

8 The nakedness of thy **father's wife** shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness.

Paul's purpose in writing was for the **spiritual welfare of the congregation** – for the care of the congregation – to enable them to spiritually mature to the point of handling their problems **themselves**.

Notice closely how much this one man's sin has impacted the whole congregation.

2 Corinthians 7:

12 Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his [the sinner] cause that had done the wrong, nor for his [the father] cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you [the congregation] in the sight of God might appear unto you.

Paul had told the congregation to handle the problem with the fornicating sinner themselves – by **putting him out** – **suspending** him until he repented.

1 Corinthians 5:

- 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye [the entire congregation] are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 5 To deliver such an one [this sort of individual] unto the Satan [the accuser, the devil] for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Paul says that this issue calls for **suspension** of the sinner from the greater body. **Put him out until** he repents. In fact, **put him out** so that he will be able to repent.

Pray for him, but deny him any social contact in the hope that in separating the sinner from the congregation – he would miss the fellowship and be motivated to repent and return – thus his spirit may be saved in the resurrection.

This kind of sin is a bad example that will cause spiritual “rot” throughout the congregation. While he was sinning, he was no longer welcome to fellowship with the holy church brethren.

When Paul says to ‘hand this man over to Satan’, he means to suspend him as a church member — remove him and his sins from the assembly of Christians — and send him out into Satan’s world that he has chosen for himself. You cannot have one foot in the **unholy** outside world, and the other foot in God’s **holy** congregation.

God’s word dictates that we always do what is Scripturally right and best for our brothers and sisters – that is **not hate** – it is Godly love.

Again in our day, a misunderstanding of the congregational responsibility leads to a severe weakening of the Church of God.

Our congregations were not mature when the apostasy came upon us – and for the most part the congregations are purposely being kept in a state of immaturity – Paul calls them babes in need of milk. This neglect of congregational involvement has impacted our congregations negatively.

A part of our problem was our giving over all of our congregational responsibilities to the minister. That left us defenseless when the Church and the minister (ministry) went haywire, as it did under the Tkaches, and it is happening now to those congregations who are deferring all their judgment to some far away unseen headquarters.

The congregations have **no say whatsoever** in these goings-on that directly affect them – and they are purposely being kept in the dark from their God given responsibilities.

It is God who **empowers** the congregation to take the responsibility.

Brethren, study this subject out!

In fact, God commands congregational involvement in their own **spiritual development** and holiness.

We’ve been covering **suspension** and **putting out** – and what God means for it to accomplish. Let’s switch gears and consider **marking** and **disfellowshippment**.

How many of us were **disfellowshipped** and **marked** for holding fast to God's Word? Disfellowshipping was and is greatly abused. We had our names read from the pulpit so that the brethren would not speak to us and shun us for holding fast to God's Truth!

It was meant to be **punitive** and to **hurt** our reputations by those of the apostasy. Here is what was said publicly — from the pulpit about us:

"We regret that it is our duty to inform you that based upon biblical instruction an ecclesiastical determination has been made to disfellowship and mark [your name here] for the spiritual protection of our members. Therefore, for your own spiritual well-being, you are advised to refrain from contact with this individual, including attending any meetings with him.

Romans 16:

- 17** Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark them** which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.
- 18** For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.).

"He is no longer a member in the Church. We bear [your name here] no ill and we should all pray that God would grant him repentance. — Church Headquarters"

Then, once when I was disfellowshipped they also marked me "for cause." Do you know what that means when they **disfellowship** and **mark** somebody "**for cause?**" It means that the reason you are being marked is because the sin you committed was so heinous — so monstrous — so atrocious, that it cannot even be mentioned from the pulpit!

They do that in order to wipe out your reputation. Paul would say, May the Lord reward them according to their works: (2 Timothy 4:14)

Those abusive ministers took on last opportunity to besmirch good names and try to destroy the true brethren. There in the Corinthian example we just looked at a moment ago – had the sin involved been **heresy**, Paul would have handled the situation differently.

When someone has gone **off** on a tangent **doctrinally** and seeks to spread their heretical doctrine among the brethren, the much more stringent and inflexible measure of **disfellowshippment** is called for.

When the Worldwide Church of God went into heresy and apostasy it would have been proper for the leaders of the heresy to have been disfellowshipped and marked. That is what should have happened. The evangelists and leading men who did not go along with the Tkaches should have come together and put them out of office and out of the Church. The faithful brethren would have backed their move.

People will say that it is **wrong** for us to **condemn** anyone. Brethren, that is not what is happening. The church does **not** condemn people – but people **do** condemn themselves.

Titus 3:

- 10** A man that is an **heretic** after the first and second admonition **reject**; [shun that person]
- 11** Knowing that he that is such is subverted [a perverted mind is not repentful], and sinneth [he is not going to stop sinning], being **condemned** of himself.

The congregation does not condemn him – but people **do** condemn themselves. After two clear warnings and Scriptural admonitions Paul brought a matter before the entire Church – to protect the flock. When we follow the Scriptures – we are under God’s authority. If we handle things contrary to the Scriptures – we have departed from God’s authority.

2 Thessalonians 3:

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

2 Thessalonians 3:

14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, **note [mark]** [distinguish by pointing out to everyone] that man, and have **no company with him** [disfellowship], that he may be ashamed.

A faithful minister will not let loyalty to an organization, or to another man, nor any ulterior motive influence his judgment when dealing with a member of the Body of Christ.

Too many ministers have thrown around disfellowshipments like a gunfight of wild cowboys at OK corral. They cause the brethren to believe that these very serious matters are handled in a haphazard way – which they never should be.

When someone must be suspended or disfellowshipped there must be ample evidence and witnesses who attest to the sinful behavior on the part of the sinner that warrants the appropriate action.

Fasting, prayer and counseling with every warning and admonition must be a part of the process. This stuff comes up all the time – notice how Paul instructed timothy and us to deal with it.

2 Timothy 2:

23 But foolish and unlearned questions **avoid**, knowing that they do gender strifes.

People want to “take on” the faithful ministry all the time – they want to fight. All I can do is show them what God says about a matter in His Word. If they can hear it – good!!! But fighting about it is not the way to go.

2 Timothy 2:

24 And the servant of the Lord must **not strive**; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that **oppose themselves**; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

2 Timothy 4:

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

They must be marked and disfellowshipped for the protection of the brethren. Drop down to verse 14 for an example of **marking**:

2 Timothy 4:

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

In closing, People must not be living in fear of being put out by the ministry.

It is reconciliation to God and to the greater Body of Christ that is of the highest priority. Only after a person is apprised of the sinful and erroneous conduct and given **every opportunity** to correct it should the disciplinary action be taken for the purpose of preserving the holiness of the congregation.

End: Suspended and Disfellowshipped