

Trinity Evangelical Church



MEMBERS HANDBOOK

BY-LAWS OUR CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

We, the members of Trinity Evangelical Church, in order to promote the work of the Church in the Spirit of Christ and thus advance His kingdom, do hereby adopt this constitution.

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this church shall be Trinity Evangelical Church, Inc.

ARTICLE II - AUTHORITY AND ORGANIZATION

A. The written Word of God as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible shall be the authoritative standard for this church body. This church does not recognize the Apocrypha as authoritative.

B. As a non-profit corporation in the State of Indiana and recognized as a 501(c)(3) religious organization, this church:

1. May not substantially participate in political campaigns for any candidate or act of legislation.
2. May not financially benefit any of its officers (elders, trustees, and ministers) except for reasonable compensation for services rendered.
3. May not perform any other activities not permitted by a corporation exempt from Federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
4. Is prepared to relinquish its 501(c)(3) status rather than compromise its mission, message, ministry, or faith.

ARTICLE III - GOVERNMENT

A. The government of this church shall be defined as presbyterial, not congregational. Though input from the congregation is sought after and encouraged, final decisions be will made by the board of elders.

B. The governing body of this church shall be the Board of Elders. (Whenever the term "Elders" is used in this constitution, it is referring to the entire Board of Elders).

ARTICLE IV - ELDERS

A. Responsibilities of Elders

1. The Elders shall direct the affairs of the church and oversee all departments, committees, and ministry teams. They shall seek to promote the health and growth of the church.

2. The Elders shall seek to fulfill their scriptural responsibilities, which include: a) training Christians for ministry; b) praying for the needs of members; c) directing the affairs of the church; d) teaching and/or preaching; e) setting a Christ-like example; f) protecting the church from false teachings; g) correcting members caught in unrepentant sin; h) establishing policies; and i) shepherding the flock. See: Acts 11:27-30; 15:1-7; 16:4,5; 20:28-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1Thessalonians 5:12,13; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 5:12,13; James 5:14,15; 1Peter 5:2,3.
3. In order to fulfill their responsibilities faithfully, the Elders shall meet together regularly, at least once a month. Each elder must be notified and invited.
4. Each elder possesses equal authority among themselves and function together as a collective whole. There is no rank among the elders as their authority is found only in their plurality.
5. Elders should make every effort to make decisions with unanimous agreement. If possible, disputable matters should be tabled until there is such agreement. If time does not permit this, then majority rules.
6. The Elders may delegate authority to other members of the church for the purpose of distributing responsibilities. The Elders, however, are ultimately responsible for all decisions made. For purposes of both efficiency and fulfilling the mandate of Ephesians 4:11-16, Elders shall make every effort to distribute various responsibilities to capable and qualified members (Acts 6:1-7).

B. Selection of Elders

1. The number of Elders shall be determined by the need and availability of qualified men.
2. Criteria for determining the qualifications of elders are to be limited to those standards found in Scripture, especially in 1Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-10. (While it is the intention of this church to help nourish both men and women to fulfill their various ministries, it is our position that the appointment to the office of Elder is limited to men as directed in 1Timothy 2:12).
3. Nomination Process. The Elders shall decide the nomination process from the following options: a) They may form their own slate of nominations; or b) choose to solicit nominations from the congregation; or c) utilize a combination of both methods.
4. Evaluation Process. The Elders will make an initial evaluation of the nominees submitted, considering their qualifications and commitment to the church body. Qualified nominees shall then be interviewed by the Elders. If accepted, the

nominee will then be asked to participate as a provisional, non-voting, elder for up to a twelve-month period. After the provisional period, the nominee and the Elders will reassess the appointment of the nominee and a decision will be made on whether to present the individual to the congregation for affirmation. The Elders reserve the right to dismiss any nominee at any stage of the evaluation process.

5. Affirmation Process. Before an elder is officially appointed to serve, members of the congregation will be afforded an opportunity to affirm the appointment in writing. (See Article VII.C.)

C. Duration of Office

1. An elder shall occupy his office as long as he: a) maintains the scriptural requirements for this office; b) is a member of this church; and c) chooses to hold his position.

2. Currently serving elders shall be affirmed by the members annually. The Elders shall formally review any case in which an elder fails to receive substantial affirmation and shall consider whether his resignation would be appropriate.

3. An elder who fails to maintain scriptural requirements will be asked to resign. Involuntary removal must be obtained by unanimous consent of the other elders.

ARTICLE V - MINISTERS

A. Responsibilities of the Minister(s)

1. The Senior Pastor shall serve as an elder and therefore must meet the requirements listed in Article IV.B.2, and be appointed per Article IV.B.5.

2. An associate, assistant, or youth minister may be appointed as an elder contingent upon the process outlined in Article V.B.

3. Job descriptions of senior, associate, assistant, and youth ministers will be determined by the Elders.

B. Selection of the Minister(s)

1. All pastors and ministers (senior, associate, assistant, youth) shall be appointed by the Elders.

2. The members of the congregation shall be afforded the opportunity to express their affirmation in writing before the Elders make a final decision to hire a Senior Pastor (see Article VI.3).

3. When a vacancy in the office of Senior Pastor occurs, the Elders shall determine the selection process.

4. Nothing in this constitution shall be construed to require the church to have a Senior Pastor.

5. Associate, assistant and/or youth ministers may be appointed and hired as necessary.

6. Pastors and Ministers shall be issued a contract specifying all relevant issues of employment, such as salary, length of contract, benefits, procedure and conditions of termination, job description, etc.

ARTICLE VI - CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

A. Congregational meetings will be held to provide open communication between the Board of Elders and the members of the Church.

1. A "Regular Congregational Meeting" will be held once a year to: a) allow various committees and ministry teams to make reports; b) proceed with any matters that might require congregational affirmation; c) affirm elders; d) review last year's financial report; and e) review next year's budget.

2. "Special Congregational Meetings" may be called by the Elders when needed. Only those matters that require attention will be brought before the Church. Though a two-week notice is preferred, a minimum of one week (including two Sunday mornings) should be given to call a Special Congregational Meeting. The calling of any Special Congregational Meeting requires the members to be informed of: a) date and time of meeting; b) location of meeting; c) subject of meeting; and d) whether a Congregational Affirmation will be requested.

B. Congregational Meetings are held for the purpose of providing information, inviting input, and issuing calls-to-action as needed.

C. "Congregational Affirmation" is an expression that refers to that opportunity where members express their approval or disapproval in writing. It is designed to allow the Elders to consider the support or lack of support the congregation may have on any given issue and thus help them to make a wise decision (Acts 6:1-6). Congregational Affirmations are not votes and do not seal decisions. All final decisions are the responsibility of the Elders.

D. Congregational meetings shall be directed by the pastor or one of the elders.

ARTICLE VII - MEMBERSHIP

A. Individuals interested in membership should contact the pastor. The process involves an initial interview, a probationary period, completing an application, and a final interview.

B. Privileges of Members. Only members of the church will be afforded the opportunities below. Additional qualifications may be required for some areas of service.

1. Participate in the process of nominating elders.
2. Offer written input on affirmations for pastors and elders.
3. Offer input and affirmation for all other matters brought before the church.
4. Serve as an elder or department head / ministry chairman.
5. Serve as a teacher of adults, youth, or children. However, older children whose parent(s) are members may teach younger children.
6. Serve as a member on any committee, ministry team, or department.
7. Serve as a youth group sponsor.
8. Participate in other areas of service: greeters, nursery workers, soundboard, ushers, music team, etc.

C. Responsibilities and Agreements of Members. By joining the church, a member clearly affirms each of the following about himself/herself:

1. I am a Christian. I understand that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ and have therefore placed my trust in Him. I recognize His Lordship both universally and personally.
2. I have been baptized by water and have made a public confession of my faith.
3. I am at least 18 years old.
4. I agree, without reservation, with the church's Statement of Faith.
5. I will support the process of church government outlined in its constitution and by-laws.
6. I will abide by the policies and procedures contained in the Member's Handbook.
7. I will faithfully and generously support the church financially, in proportion to my income.
8. I will support the church with my conversations, refraining from gossip, slander, malicious talk, or anything that would damage fellow members and/or the ministry of the church.

9. I will attend Sunday services faithfully.

10. I will contribute my time, talents, gifts, and abilities to the ministry of this church.

11. I will support the pastor and the elders as leaders of this church body; I accept that they are over me in the Lord (1Thess 5:12) and that they are accountable to God for their oversight of the church and its members (Hebrews 13:17).

12. I will make every effort to attend congregational meetings and participate in calls-to-action that may be issued.

13. I will neither seek nor maintain membership in any lodge or secret society that demands (a) an oath of total allegiance and secrecy or (b) participation in rituals of a religious nature that are not distinctively and exclusively Christian.

14. I agree to receive instruction, counsel, and, if necessary, discipline should my words or actions become sinful, compromising my personal testimony or the testimony of this church.

15. In the event I decide to dissolve my relationship with this church, I will make such an intention clear to an elder and will provide a written explanation that can be made available to other members.

16. I understand that if I am involved in an unresolved church discipline process, my membership cannot be transferred in good standing.

C. Termination of membership.

1. Any member who fails to meet their membership obligations (Article VII C) will be encouraged to reexamine their commitment to the church. If there is an unwillingness to meet said obligations, the membership status will be terminated.

2. This church does not maintain an inactive membership role. Any member who becomes inactive for 3 months will have their membership status terminated.

3. In the event that the procedure of church discipline, as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 and other Scriptures, fails to result in repentance of sin, a member will be subject to expulsion.

4. Any member who geographically relocates permanently and is therefore unable to maintain regular attendance will no longer be considered a member of this church.

ARTICLE VIII - AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended by the Board of Elders, after having utilized the Congregational Affirmation process as defined in Article VII.C.

ARTICLE IX – OFFICERS OF INCORPORATION

Current principals of Trinity Evangelical Church, Inc., shall consist of at least a President and Secretary. Officers are to be members of the church, appointed and removed by the Elders. Officers shall serve as legal representatives of the church, authorized to sign legal documents on behalf of Trinity Evangelical Church, Inc., as directed by the Elders.

ARTICLE X - CREDENTIALS

As an autonomous ecclesiastical body, Trinity Evangelical Church issues ordination and licensing credentials for its ministerial staff upon employment.

A. Ordained Ministers.

1. Requirements: Ordination is granted to the full time Senior Pastor.
2. Duties: To solemnize marriage according to the laws of Indiana; to officiate at funerals; to administer water baptism; to administer the Lord's Supper; to perform other duties consistent with the Christian ministry.

B. Licensed Ministers.

1. Requirements: Licensing is granted to all non-ordained full-time and part-time ministers.
2. Duties: To perform duties assigned by the Elders, which may include: officiating at funerals; administering water baptism and the Lord's Supper; and performing other duties consistent with the Christian ministry.

ARTICLE XI – POLICIES

The Elders shall form policies and procedures for the operation of the church. These are to be stated in a Member's Handbook and will be updated by the Elders as needed.

Revised February 2017

FINANCE COMMITTEE MANAGING OUR INTERNAL CONTROLS

1. Job Descriptions

- A. Primary Expense Treasurer – reconciles checkbook, pays withholding taxes; oversees the payment of expenses and QuickBooks Online.
- B. Secondary Expense Treasurer - pays weekly expenses and bills; enters data in QuickBooks Online
- C. Donation Treasurer – records contributions; issues receipts; oversees offering counters
- D. Committee Head – oversees the Finance Committee; reports to elders
- E. Offering Counters – serve on a rotation to count the Sunday offerings

2. Ensure proper procedures are followed regarding the paying and reporting of expenses:

- A. All reimbursements must be processed with a requisition form. The requisition form must be filled out completely and properly.
- B. Heads of departments must sign the requisition form.
- C. Either of the Expense Treasurers shall issue payments accordingly. He may challenge any expense he suspects is not properly approved. He may withhold payment until he resolves his questions and/or concerns with the payee, the department head, or an elder.
- D. The Expense Treasurers have no authority to approve or deny requests for payments.
- E. After payments are made, requisitions and attached receipts are to be given to the head of the finance committee. He shall look over each requisition and “sign off” on them, making sure that everything is properly filled out and that the payment was properly approved. He shall take any concerns or questions to either the payee or to the elders.
- F. After the Committee Head is satisfied that the bills and requisitions are properly approved, he shall give them to the church secretary to be filed under their designated department numbers, according to the year they were paid. No receipt shall ever be discarded or destroyed.

3. Ensure proper procedures are followed regarding offerings:

A. Offerings are to be counted by two people in a private and secure location, preferably in the kitchen or one of the church offices. Husbands, wives, or other relatives are not to serve as counters together on the same morning.

B. Anyone serving on the finance committee or as one of the treasurers should not be involved in the weekly counting of the offering.

E. A tally sheet shall be filled out by those counting the offerings, and signed. This tally is given to the Donation Treasurer who will record contributions of donors. The tally sheet is not to be discarded, but kept on file.

F. The monies collected from the offering shall be deposited in church's checking account in a timely manner.

G. The Donation Treasurer shall issue end-of-year receipts to all donors whose contributions are \$100 or more.

H. Under no circumstances shall funds be taken from the offering and distributed. All expenses shall be administered through the church's checking account.

5. The committee shall meet once a year, in late September, to review the salaries and benefits of all employees. Suggestions for changes shall be offered to the elders for their consideration. The committee shall also present recommendations for Christmas bonuses to employees.

6. Ultimately, the elders are responsible for the annual budget. They may delegate the task to the finance committee if they wish. Regardless, they should offer the proposed budget to the finance committee for their input before it is shared with the congregation at the annual meeting in January.

7. The committee may be called upon to perform other related tasks as needed.

3/19/10

POLICIES

USE OF FACILITIES

The church's facilities were provided through God's benevolence and by the sacrificial generosity of church members. TEC desires that its facilities be used for the fellowship of the Body of Christ and to bring God glory. Therefore, the church cannot allow its facilities to be used for activities or beliefs that are contrary to its faith and convictions. Our "restricted use" policy ensures that the church will not inadvertently cooperate in practices it finds objectionable. Church members, their immediate families, and organized groups that are part of the ministry, organization, or sponsored activities of the church are eligible to submit a request for use of the facility (a form is provided for this purpose). All requests must be approved by the senior pastor. Denials may be contested by appealing to the board of elders.

FUNDRAISING

It is the general policy that the *church treasury* is the source for needed funds. However, certain programs within the children's or youth ministries may be appropriate for some types of fundraising. In these cases the activity to raise the funds is seen as a benefit as much as, if not more than, the actual funds raised. Therefore each fundraising activity must be considered by the elders on a case-by-case basis. The following guidelines will be used to help determine approval.

1. Funds raised are to be used for educational or mission projects and not recreational or self-serving purposes. The project must have a ministry focus. Examples: A winter ski trip would not be approved; meeting the expenses of attending Summit Ministries would be approved.
2. We prefer the fundraiser offer an actual service (labor involved) rather than merely reselling goods. Car washes would be approved. Selling home-baked items would be approved. However, selling magazine subscriptions, boxed candy, or published cookbooks would generally be discouraged.
3. People are not to be approached on a one-to-one basis to buy or contribute. Items to be sold may be displayed on a table, or announced to the church body from the pulpit and/or newsletter. Under no circumstances should individuals be pressured to participate.

WORSHIP GUIDELINES

1. Songs must be doctrinally correct. If an expression may seem confusing or unfamiliar then the worship leader should offer clarification.
2. Worship is our subjective response to God's objective truths. Our time of praise and singing should be seen as a part of our on-going attempts to disciple and train the believers.
3. Songs that speak about God's truths are better than songs that merely speak about our feelings, actions, or our own acts of praise. However, subjective songs should not

be totally prohibited (note some of the Psalms), but we should be conscious of placing them appropriately with the more didactic type songs.

4. Songs that ask God to sanctify us (or similar requests) that are sung from the perspective of a prayer also have value, especially if the song contains strong content about God's character.

5. When all else is equal, songs that are sung from the corporate perspective ("We") are better than individual perspective ("I").

6. Interaction between the song leaders with the congregation should be encouraged (pointing out significant truths in certain verses, explaining difficult expressions, etc.). Again, the song service should be seen as an opportunity to teach and exhort the congregation with sound truths.

A PASTOR OR ELDER WHO YIELDS TO SEXUAL SIN

Sexual sin shall consist of fornication, adultery, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, transvestism, prostitution, pedophilia, exposure, voyeurism, or viewing pornography. Pornography shall consist of that material (audio, video, print) that is designed to provoke sexual lust. It may consist of, but is not necessarily limited to, the following: A) Viewing "soft porn" magazines such as Playboy; B) Watching triple -X or erotic NC-17 movies; C) Accessing sex websites; D) Calling sex hotlines; E) Reading "adult" books or literature.

Any pastor or elder who yields to sexual sin shall be terminated immediately. The congregation will be informed of the reason for the termination. If the pastor or elder is remorseful and repentant, the termination shall proceed nevertheless. However, the congregation will be made aware of his repentance and no further action will be taken. The termination of office is not to be regarded as punishment, but for failing to maintain biblical qualifications. A man's leadership is only as good as the trust and respect the congregation gives him. While he may be forgiven for his sin, he has demonstrated a character flaw that disqualifies him from office.

If the pastor or elder is not repentant, and persists in the sin, even after his employment or office is terminated, he will be subject to church discipline for the purpose of repentance and restoration.

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND YOUTH SPONSORS

Requirements for those involved in instructing others include: 1) Membership at TEC; 2) signing *Evangelical Affirmations* and *Supervisory Policies*; 3) being involved in a home group or participating in book assignments; 4) demonstrating regular attendance on Sunday mornings; and 5) meeting standards for a church servant ("deacon[ness]") in 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

WEDDINGS, DIVORCES, AND REMARRIAGE *By Wendell Brane*

I am often asked to officiate at weddings. Many times I am unable to accommodate these requests because of certain policies I have established. For the sake of brevity, my purpose here is to simply outline these without full explanations. As always, I would be happy to discuss my reasons in person with anyone interested.

1. I will only officiate weddings for believers. To involve the pomp and circumstance of a church setting – complete with a Minister of the Gospel and the invoking of God’s blessings – for nonchristians who have, by their lives and convictions rejected both the church and the Gospel, is a brazen contradiction.
2. Both the bride and the groom should be in agreement on which church will serve as their church home. Because the pastor of that church is over them in the Lord (1Thess 5:12), he should be the one solemnizing their vows. Therefore, I will only officiate weddings for members of TEC. In light of this, TEC members are discouraged from asking other clergy to perform their weddings.
3. If either party was previously divorced, then it will become essential to determine whether the divorce was biblically justified. This may require interviewing those who have firsthand information of the situation, including family members and a former pastor. It is my position that the Bible allows divorce for matters other than adultery (this was addressed in a teaching given on December 9, 2007, available on our website).
4. I reserve the right to refuse participation in any wedding I believe to be unbiblical or unwise.
5. Sexual purity before marriage is expected, and I may withdraw or postpone involvement if this is compromised. Couples are expected to have guidelines in place to ensure purity during their courtship.
6. Those seeking marriage must undergo premarital counseling that I provide.
7. It is my intent to honor the wishes of the bride and groom and incorporate their ideas into the wedding ceremony. However, I have a planned order of service that I work from which couples are asked to respect. Special music, readings, and testimonies must be in good taste, honor God, and uphold the tradition of marriage.
8. I do not recognize homosexual relationships as valid for marriage. Nor do I perform civil unions.

YOUTH WORKERS SUPERVISORY POLICIES

The following policies apply to all workers, volunteer and staff, who may be involved in serving children under 18 years old. This would include, but is not limited to: nursery workers, Sunday School teachers, and youth group sponsors. The term “**children**” will be used to refer to anyone under 18 years old, including infants. The term “**youth worker**” will be used to refer to adults (volunteer or paid staff) who work with children.

1. Qualifications

Anyone with a criminal history of abusing or molesting children will not be qualified to serve as a youth worker.

2. Multiple Adults

As a general rule, a minimum of two adults should be present during any church activity involving children. See below for Sunday School exceptions. Under no circumstances should one male adult ever be alone with one female child unless they are blood relatives.

3. Sunday School

Sunday School classes typically involve one adult teacher. This is permissible when the following conditions are met: 1) The window in the classroom door must not be obstructed; 2) There are at least three children in the class; 3) The door must be kept ajar if the teacher is male and all students are female.

4. Parental Permission

The church encourages all youth workers to avoid situations where an adult is alone with a child. However, there may be some situations where it may not necessarily be inappropriate. Examples would include a youth sponsor taking a teen out for a Coke in a public place, or an adult providing transportation for a child. In such situations, the following requirements must be met: 1) The child must be the same sex as the adult; 2) Permission from the child’s parent must first be obtained.

5. Report Suspicious Behavior

Should you observe any suspicious behavior between an adult and a child, you should immediately confront the adult and investigate the situation. After you can guarantee the safety of the child, the incident should be reported to the Pastor or an Elder. Any such event will be thoroughly investigated by the eldership.

6. Adequate Supervision

Any program involving children should always include adequate supervisory personnel.

7. Membership

All youth workers must be members of the church, in good standing.

8. Application

All youth workers must fill out and sign the *Youth Worker's Screening Form* and be approved by the eldership to work in this capacity.

EVANGELICAL AFFIRMATIONS

All teachers and leaders must adhere to the following beliefs and positions.

1. Jesus Christ and the Gospel

We affirm the good news that the Son of God became man to offer himself for sinners and to give them everlasting life.

We affirm that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man with two distinct natures united in one person. The incarnation, substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ are essential to the gospel. Through these events a gracious God has acted in time and history to reach out to humanity and save all who believe in him.

Without Christ and the biblical gospel, sinful humanity is without salvation and is left to create its own "gospels". These "gospels" take various forms and many are set forth by so-called "Christian" sects that omit the heart of the biblical gospel. Any "gospel" without the Christ of the Bible cannot be the saving gospel, and leaves sinners estranged from God and under his wrath.

We affirm that the people of God are commanded to witness to the world concerning God's offer of redemption in Christ. The gospel, working by the Holy Spirit, is powerful to transform the lives of individuals lost in sin; provides believers with meaning for life on this earth; empowers the church to accomplish Christ's work in the world; serves as a leavening influence in society; and sustains the faithful in hope for the life to come.

2. Creation and Fall

We affirm that the triune God created heaven and earth, and made human beings, both male and female, in his own image. In his providence God upholds all things and reveals himself through creation and history.

Because of Adam's fall, all became sinners and stand under God's righteous judgment. Human rebellion against God shows itself today in many ways: such as in atheistic denials of God's existence; in functional atheism that concedes God's existence but denies his relevance to personal conduct; in oppression of the poor and helpless; in occult concepts of reality; in the abuse of earth's resources; and in theories of an accidental naturalistic evolutionary origin of the universe and human life; and in many other ways. As a result of the fall of the race into sin, human beings must be born again to new life in Christ. They can be pardoned and redeemed by faith in Christ alone.

3. God as Source and Ground of Truth

We affirm that God the Creator is the source of truth and the ground of the unity of all truth. By revelation God makes known the truth concerning himself, the world,

human sin and redemption. God's revelation addresses the whole person-intellect, will and emotion. The Holy Spirit accompanies his Word in convicting, instructing, nurturing, and empowering his people so they learn to live in fellowship with God and other persons in accordance with scriptural directives.

We reject irrationalistic theologies and philosophies that compromise or deny objective truth. We also reject rationalistic alternatives based on autonomous human reason.

We recognize that as finite and sinful creatures we do not have complete knowledge of God, and that "now we know in part." We rejoice, nonetheless, that God reveals himself in creation and the Bible.

We encourage Christian churches and Christian schools to develop and implement disciplined instruction that relates the mind of Christ to all knowledge, that emphasizes the compatibility of scientific inquiry with biblical teachings about nature, and that challenges believers to understand and apply a Christian view of the world to all of life.

4. Holy Scripture

We affirm the complete truthfulness and the full and final authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the Word of God written. The appropriate response to it is humble assent and obedience.

The Word of God becomes effective by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through it. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit creates faith and provides a sufficient doctrinal and moral guide for the church. Just as God's self-giving love to us in the gospel provides the supreme motive for the Christian life, so the teaching of Holy Scripture informs us of what are truly acts of love.

Attempts to limit the truthfulness of inspired Scripture to "faith and practice," viewed as less than the whole of Scripture, or worse, to assert that it errs in such matters as history or the world of nature, depart not only from the Bible's representation of its own veracity, but also from the central tradition of the Christian churches.

The meaning of Scripture must neither be divorced from its words nor dictated by reader response. The inspired author's intention is essential to our understanding of the text.

No Scripture must be interpreted in isolation from other passages of Scripture. All Scripture is true and profitable, but Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. The truth of any single passage must be understood in light of the truth of all passages of Scripture. Our Lord has been pleased to give us the whole corpus of Scripture to instruct and guide his church.

5. The Church

We affirm that the church is a worshiping and witnessing community of Christians who profess faith in Christ and submit to his authority. Christ is building his church where his Word is preached and his name confessed. He sustains his church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We affirm that the church is to provide for corporate worship on the part of believers, the instruction of the faithful in the Word of God and its application, and the

fellowship, comfort, exhortation, rebuke, and sharing in the needs of the entire body of Christ. In a day of lax doctrine and even more lax discipline, we specially affirm that Scripture requires the defense of sound doctrine, the practice of church discipline, and a call for renewal.

We affirm the mission of the church to be, primarily, that of evangelism of the lost through witness to the gospel by life and by word; and secondarily, to be salt and light to the whole world as we seek to alleviate the burdens and injustices of a suffering world. Though some are specially called to one ministry or another, no believer is exonerated from the duty of bearing witness to the gospel or of providing help to those in need.

We distance ourselves from any movement that seeks to establish a world church on the premise of a religious pluralism that denies normative Christian doctrines. Rather we encourage efforts that help believers and faithful churches move toward fellowship and unity with one another in the name of Christ, the Lord of the church.

6. Doctrine and Practice

We affirm the critical need to conjoin faith and practice. To profess conversion without a genuine change of heart and life violates biblical teaching and substitutes dead orthodoxy for a living faith. Christian leaders have a responsibility to serve as spiritual role models and moral examples. Any disjunction between faith and practice generates hypocrisy.

We send forth an urgent call for the practice of holiness and righteousness. Justification by faith must issue in sanctification. By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are to deny such characteristics of a selfish nature as immorality, evil desire, and covetousness, to walk in righteousness and integrity, and to practice justice and love at all times. Purity of doctrine must be accompanied by purity of life.

7. Human Rights and Righteousness

We affirm that God commands us to seek justice in human affairs whether in the church or in society. In accord with the biblical call for righteousness, God's people should model justice in social relationships and should protest, confront, and strive to alleviate injustice. We must respond to the plight of the destitute, hungry, and homeless; of victims of political oppression and gender or race discrimination, including apartheid; and of all others deprived of rightful protection under the law. We confess our own persistent sin of racism, which ignores the divine image in humankind.

We affirm the integrity of marriage, the permanence of the wife-husband relationship, the importance of the family for the care and nourishment of children, and the primary responsibility of parents for the instruction of their children.

We affirm that evangelicals living in democratic societies should be active in public affairs. We advocate a public philosophy that advances just government and protects the rights of all. In cooperation with like-minded persons, we should support and promote legislation reflecting consistent moral values. We condemn abortion-on-demand as a monstrous evil, deplore drug and alcohol abuse, and lament sexual hedonism, pornography, homosexual practices, and child abuse. We encourage

evangelicals to exercise responsible stewardship of their own personal wealth and the conservation of the earth's resources.

8. Religious Liberty

We affirm the duty of state and society to provide religious liberty as a basic human right. We deplore any oppression to maintain or elicit religious commitments. We hold that civil government should not arbitrate spiritual differences, and that neither church nor mosque nor temple nor synagogue should use political power to enforce its own sectarian doctrines or practices. We do not consider laws to protect individual rights, such as the right to life or the freedom of anyone to confess his or her faith openly in society, to be a sectarian position.

9. Second Coming and Judgment

We affirm that Christ will return in power and glory to bring full and eternal salvation to his people and to judge the world. This prospect of the Lord's return to vindicate his holiness and subjugate all evil should accelerate our witness and mission in the world.

We affirm that only through the work of Christ can any person be saved and be resurrected to live with God forever. Unbelievers will be separated eternally from God. Concern for evangelism should not be compromised by any illusion that all will be finally saved (universalism).

We affirm the preaching of ultimate hope in and through Christ. In an age of anxiety and despair, the blessed hope of God's ultimate victory is not only a warning of divine judgment, but a wonderful hope that gives light and meaning to the human heart.

Conclusion: Evangelical Identity

Evangelicals believe, first of all, the gospel as it is set forth in the Bible. The word evangelical is derived from the biblical term *euangelion* meaning "good news." It is the Good News that God became man in Jesus Christ to live and die and rise again from the dead in order to save us from our sin and all its consequences. The Savior's benefits and his salvation are bestowed upon us freely and graciously and are received through personal faith in Christ. They are not conditioned on our merit or personal goodness but are based wholly on the mercy of God.

Evangelicals are also to be identified by what is sometimes called the material or content principle of evangelicalism. They hold to all of the most basic doctrines of the Bible: for example, the triuneness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; the pre-existence, incarnation, full deity and humanity of Christ united in one person; his sinless life, his authoritative teaching; his substitutionary atonement; his bodily resurrection from the dead, his second coming to judge the living and the dead; the necessity of holy living; the imperative of witnessing to others about the gospel; the necessity of a life of service to God and humankind; and the hope in a life to come. These doctrines emerge from the Bible and are summarized in the Apostles' Creed and the historic confessions of evangelical churches.

Evangelicals have a third distinguishing mark. In accordance with the teaching of their Lord they believe the Bible to be the final and authoritative source of all doctrine.

This is often called the formative or forming principle of evangelicalism. Evangelicals hold the Bible to be God's Word and, therefore, completely true and trustworthy (and this is what we mean by the words *infallible* and *inerrant*). It is the authority by which they seek to guide their thoughts and their lives.

These then are the three distinguishing marks of all evangelicals. Without constant fidelity to all three marks, evangelicals will be unable to meet the demands of the future and interact effectively with the internal and external challenges noted in these affirmations.

Evangelical churches also hold various distinctive doctrines that are important to them; but nonetheless, they share this common evangelical faith.

*Prepared by a number of leading Evangelicals at a conference sponsored by the **National Association of Evangelicals** and **Trinity Evangelical Divinity School**.*

WOMEN TEACHING ADULTS

Over the years there has been a lot of controversy over the role of women in ministry. Some churches allow women to serve in any role, while others restrict women from roles that would involve teaching or authority over adult males within the body. The discussion centers primarily around the interpretation of two New Testament passages: I Timothy 2:11 and I Corinthians 14:33-35. In an attempt to understand the issue and the Biblical material, the elders spent a number of months in 2003 studying this issue and developed a position for practice at TEC. What follows is a brief summary of the discussion.

At the starting point, we recognize that Biblically, there is no ontological difference between men and women. Before God, both share equally in the same responsibility in creation and the same inheritance in redemption. There is nothing inherent in a woman's nature that would disqualify her from teaching children, women or adult males.

So the question is not of value, but role. The major passage in the discussion is I Timothy 2:12:

I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

Different groups have disagreed over what is being forbidden in this verse. Is all teaching by a woman verboten, as some teach? Others hold that Paul is only saying that women may not teach men; teaching other women and children is fine. Still others

conclude that women must not teach in a congregation when men are in audience. Finally, many believe that what is being denied is that women may serve in the role of an elder, who both teaches and has authority in the church.

When we compare scripture with scripture, several points stand out. First, all teaching is not in mind here. Many passages of scripture support (or compliment) women teaching others in various capacities. Women teaching other women (Titus 2:4), women teaching children (Prov1:8), even instructing men in private settings (Acts 18: 24-28).

In addition, certain activities in corporate worship are instructional by nature. In Colossians 3:16, Paul says that our songs should instruct:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Elsewhere in I Corinthians 11 Paul permits women to participate in public prayer and “prophesies” (with head covered), which he later defines in I Corinthians 14 as instructional.

No one seems to be suggesting that women may not participate in singing worship songs, or praying and prophecy if men are present in the congregation even though these activities constitute teaching. Instead, from these examples, it would seem that what is being withheld here is not every type of instruction but some specific type—namely, the teaching authority in the church. This is consistent with the context of the passage:

- The text moves from this passage into a discussion of the qualification of elders.
- The Greek word used here for “teaching” usually takes on a sense of authoritative teaching in the pastoral epistles; that is, teaching that is to be faithfully preserved by the elders. Paul says that an elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”
- The verb “to teach” is a present infinitive, implying an ongoing activity or practice. This seems to correspond with the regular ongoing authoritative teaching of the church, not an occasional address to the church.
- If the phrase “to teach or have authority over” is matched with any church role it would seem to be the activities of an elder.

There is another position which holds that this passage is addressing a specific cultural situation present at the time Paul was writing to Timothy. According to that position, this passage is written to restrict the false women teachers of Ephesians from promulgating

a false doctrine and is not meant to be a restriction for all times. According to them, Paul later changed his position and wrote in Galatians 3:28,

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We have neither the time nor space to address all the pertinent issues of this debate, but some brief observations:

1. There is no evidence from 1st century Ephesus that supports any of the proposed scenarios put forth by people who hold this position. The scenarios are ad-hoc creations to support the desired conclusion.
2. Paul puts as his reasoning the order of creation (vs 13-14), not the current situation. If anything denotes permanence, it is an appeal to the way things were in the beginning.
3. Galatians 3:28 is talking about our equal standing before God. This does not mean all differences are obliterated. There are still males and females, and God can specify differences in roles between them. There are still Jews and Gentiles, and Paul even talks about differences in blessings in Romans 9, delineating the special role of Israel. His point in Galatians 3:28 is that none of these differences makes us more pleasing to God. None of these earn merit.
4. If false teaching is the problem, why not address that instead of restricting all women?

For these and other reasons, we find this argument a case of special pleading and without merit.

This leaves a final question: What about I Corinthians 14:33-35? It is a particularly difficult passage to interpret. However, it is clear that if it is genuine, it cannot be talking about all speech because Paul has just endorsed women praying and prophesying in public in I Corinthians chapter 11. Many commentaries believe that since in this immediate context Paul is talking about participating in the evaluation of prophecy, women are being restricted from that activity—not speech in general. It seems to be the best of the possible understandings of this verse.

The question is, "May a woman teach adults, including men and women, in a formal church setting?" It is our conclusion that the distinction lies not between men and women, but between elders and non-elders. Anyone who teaches in the local church, does so *under the elders*. The elders are ultimately responsible for all teaching (choosing teachers, setting curriculum, correcting errors, etc.). All teachers, both men and women, share the same opportunities and responsibilities under the elders. In light of the points above: 1) women may not serve as elders, but 2) should not be disqualified from teaching simply because they are women.

WHAT ABOUT TITHING?

Tithing (contributing ten percent of one's income to the church) has enjoyed a long tradition. The practice is clearly taught in the Old Testament but is barely mentioned in the New. Jesus alludes to it in passing (Matt. 23:23), and the author of Hebrews refers to it only to illustrate a point about Melchizedek and Levi. There is, therefore, some debate on whether tithing is biblically mandated for Christians. Without taking time to exhaust the argument here, Trinity Evangelical Church believes that it isn't. However, the Scriptures are clear about believers supporting the work and missions of the local church, and we would like to see tithing serve as a starting point when members are considering their financial commitments.

The New Testament teaches that we are to give eagerly and cheerfully, suggesting enthusiasm for the ministry we support. It also teaches that we are to give proportionally to our income, indicating that we all should put our oars in the water and sacrifice equally. Since we all benefit from the various expenses of the church, it follows that we should all share in bearing the costs. In 2 Corinthians 8-10, Paul appeals to these principles of enthusiasm, equality, and proportionate giving when encouraging the believers at Corinth to be generous.

Though we do not appeal to a biblical command, we do nonetheless humbly ask our members to give ten percent of their gross income to support the expenses of the church and its outreach projects. The request is one made of everyone equally, and is based on the assumption that all who are members believe in this church, and believe in it enough to support it.

Please consider the following:

1. We strive to be careful with the funds entrusted to us. It is our purpose to be conservative with the utilities, supplies, decorations, salaries, capital improvements, etc. Each fall the elders and finance committee spend a significant amount of time working through the details of the next year's budget, anticipating expenses from all the different utilities, supplies, salaries, departments, ministries, missions and so forth.
2. Our church books are open for all members to examine (except records on the contributions of individual donors). No question will go unanswered.
3. Trinity Evangelical Church financially supports outside ministries and missions.
4. Gifts made to Trinity Evangelical Church are tax deductible.

BAPTISM

Baptism is one of two ordinances for the church specifically commanded by Christ (Matt 28:19). Trinity Evangelical Church observes believer's baptism, formally known as credobaptism. We hold that baptism is for those who have made a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. As an act of post-conversion obedience, baptism functions as a public testimony of the individual's salvation and his formal initiation into the faith. We believe this to be the model of baptism as it is described in the New Testament, in accounts such as the following:

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. **Acts 2:41;**

But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. **Acts 8:12;**

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. **Acts 16:14-15;**

Because our requirement is a "credible profession of faith," we do not set an automatic age level for baptism. Faith in a Biblical sense involves knowledge, assent, and trust—basic knowledge of Christian belief, assent to its truth, and a "whole-life" trust demonstrated by actions. This cannot be assessed by an age requirement; it can only be determined through personal interaction. Our practice is for the interested candidate to approach the senior pastor with his or her desire for baptism. The senior pastor will arrange an interview with the candidate to explore his or her understanding and commitment to the truths of the faith. The pastor will either confirm the candidate's readiness or recommend a delay.

Over the centuries there have been a number of ways baptism has been implemented in various churches. Our practice is total immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, believing this to be the model of baptism seen in the early church for the following reasons: (1) The New Testament word for baptism (baptizō) generally refers to dipping or dunking an object; (2) Accounts in the New Testament seem to imply immersion (Mark 1:5, Mark 1:10, John 3:23, Acts 8:36, 38-39); and (3) The main symbolism of baptism—the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and our union with Him (Romans 6: 3-4 and Colossians 2:11-12)—is best pictured by total immersion rather than the alternatives of sprinkling or pouring.

Baptism, as an ordinance of God, is not something to be treated lightly. Yet because we live in a fallen world with a divided church, many denominations of which use different

modes in baptism, we must deal realistically with people who have previously been baptized in a church with a different understanding of the rite. While we must always insist that a baptism must have been performed in the name of the Triune God to be valid, other situations allow for some grace depending on the individual's understanding of his or her past baptism, its meaning and impact on his or her life, and whether he or she has remained in the faith. The issue of whether to re-baptize or not is best worked out on an individual basis with the senior pastor or elders.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

PRIVILEGES

Church members will be afforded the opportunities to:

1. Participate in the process of nominating elders as described in the constitution.
2. Offer written input on affirmations for pastors and elders.
3. Offer input and affirmations for all other matters brought before the church.

Providing that additional qualifications are met, members may:

4. Serve as an elder, department head, ministry chairman, and youth group sponsor.
5. Serve as a teacher of adults, youth, and children.
6. Serve as a member on any committee, ministry team, and department.
7. Serve on the worship team or participate in other areas of service: greeters, nursery workers, running soundboard, etc.

RESPONSIBILITIES

By joining Trinity Evangelical Church, a member clearly affirms each of the following about himself/herself:

1. I am a Christian. I understand that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ and have therefore placed my trust in Him. I recognize His Lordship both universally and personally.
2. I have been baptized by water and have made a public confession of my faith.
3. I am at least 18 years old.
4. I understand that joining this church simply formalizes my commitment to the people of this body. I also understand that membership in a local church does not constitute the basis for my salvation or guarantee eternal life.
5. I agree, without reservation, with the church's Statement of Faith.

6. I will support the process of church government outlined in its constitution and by-laws.
7. I will abide by the policies and procedures contained in the Member's Handbook.
8. I will faithfully and generously support the church financially, in proportion to my income.
9. I will support the church with my conversations, refraining from gossip, slander, malicious talk, or anything that would damage fellow members and/or the ministry of the church.
10. I will attend Sunday services on a regular basis.
11. I will contribute my time, talents, gifts, and abilities to the ministry of this church.
12. I will support the pastor and the elders as leaders of this church body.
13. I will neither seek nor maintain membership in any lodge or secret society that demands (a) an oath of total allegiance and secrecy or (b) participation in rituals of a religious nature that are not distinctively and exclusively Christian.
14. I agree to receive instruction, counsel, and, if necessary, discipline should my words or actions become sinful, compromising my personal testimony or the testimony of this church.
15. In the event I decide to dissolve my relationship with this church, I will make such an intention clear to an elder and will provide a written explanation that can be made available to other members.
16. I understand that if I am involved in an unresolved church discipline process, that my membership cannot be transferred in good standing.

ADDENDUM

The following articles are included primarily for reference purposes.

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CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION

Edited transcripts of a sermon series presented in January, 2004.

I. INTRODUCTION: A BALANCED AND BIBLICAL APPROACH

Though this subject is commonly referred to as church discipline, we prefer the expression "restoration." Discipline is an accurate word, and one that we will use, but it tends to conjure up images of punishment, and that is not what this is all about. When a fellow member falls into sin and refuses to repent, the goal is not punishment, but restoration. It is critical that we always keep this in mind.

The Bible addresses this subject head-on. Jesus himself gives us specific steps for the church to take, and we find examples of this being practiced in some of Paul's letters, giving us even more insight. Because the Bible provides us with good instruction about all of this, we are not left with much, if any, guesswork. It is all pretty well laid out.

Because the Bible addresses this in a direct way, we have therefore decided not to take the space to defend this practice. We realize that some may have come from churches where this was abused, and church discipline was used as a weapon of control and manipulation. Understandably, any talk about this practice can make some folks quite uncomfortable. As you read the case presented here, we are confident that such fears can be quieted.

On the other hand, many of us have backgrounds from the other extreme, where the church we were a part never spoke of it at all. Even when a believer was involved in gross immorality, the church would keep its distance and not intervene. Some church leaders are afraid of upsetting people, and go out of their way to avoid accusations of judging. It becomes easier then to implement other measures instead of the ones outlined in the Scriptures.

Both examples are unloving. Church discipline cannot become a weapon in the hands of tyrannical leaders to enforce conformity. At the same time, we must love each other enough to be firm when all positive steps have failed. The Scriptures provide us with a clearly defined model that is balanced, effective, and altogether loving.

Therefore, all we plan to say in defense of church discipline is this: it is not something that originates in the traditions of man; it originates in the Word of God, and it is not presented to us as one of many options to consider, but rather we are commanded to implement it when necessary. A church does not have the luxury of choosing “peace with the people” as a higher priority than “purity of the people.” A church that fails or refuses to carry out what the Scriptures clearly demand will have to answer to God for it.

One more thing, by means of introduction. This particular subject seems to have many related issues, each needing an adequate explanation before one can truly appreciate it fully. For here we must come to grips with such important subjects as sin and the fall of man and sinful nature, with the authority of God’s word, with church structure, accountability, and church authority. There is also a need to deal with issues like the purity of one’s example and witness, and the purity of the church’s witness. The subjects of repentance and humility and love and forgiveness and confession all, obviously, play a major part. However, we simply can’t explore all of these here, as important as they are to the subject. We will assume that the reader is fairly well-grounded in these matters.

II. THE MATTHEW 18 PROCESS

Let us begin with an example: Sam and Bob are both Christians and members of the same church. Sam sells a car to Bob. Sam tells Bob that the car is in perfect condition, has never been in an accident, and is worth more than what he is asking for it. But since he wants to help him out, he is willing to offer it to Bob for a special price. Bob makes the purchase.

Soon, Bob notices small pieces of glass inside the bottom of the rear window and gets suspicious. After some research, he learns that the car indeed had been in a serious wreck. What is Bob’s next step?

A. Step 1

The answer is given to us by Jesus in Matthew 18, verse 15.

IF YOUR BROTHER SINS AGAINST YOU, GO AND SHOW HIM HIS FAULT, JUST BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU. IF HE LISTENS TO YOU, YOU HAVE WON YOUR BROTHER OVER.

Seems simple enough. Unfortunately, this is seldom the first step that Christians take. Let’s take a moment to look at some things Jesus did not say.

First, Jesus did not tell us, “Just ignore it.” It is true that we are to forgive those who wrong us, but the issue here is more than forgiveness. A brother who sins needs to deal with his sin and must, therefore, be confronted with his wrongdoing. Jesus is specific: “Show him his fault.” If he is not confronted, then this sin will certainly be repeated again. Someone else will be swindled. The goal here is to force him to deal with it so

that it will not be repeated. If Sam claims to be a Christian, then he must live a life consistent with that confession.

Secondly, there are some who would advise Bob to just pray about it and “leave the matter in the hands of God” or to pray for wisdom about what to do. Certainly Bob is to pray about it, and he is to place his trust in God regarding this situation. Indeed, Bob should pray for wisdom on how to approach Sam, that the Lord will help him to be gentle, yet firm, to express just the right words when speaking to Sam. But there is no need to pray for wisdom on what to do, for the Bible has already said what to do. That part is clear, and to substitute prayer for obedience is itself a contradiction of faith.

Thirdly, Jesus did not instruct us to go and tell others. Nor did He tell us to tell the pastor and the elders. Nor to raise it up as a prayer request at the next home Bible study.

This process in Matthew 18 is comprised of several stages, and each stage has a purpose designed to achieve the desired outcome. The first stage, spoken here by Jesus in verse 15, is one that is private. It is to be “just between the two of you.”

All sorts of problems arise if Bob decides to go around bad-mouthing Sam behind his back. If someone has wronged you, do not say anything about it to anyone until you first meet with the offender. The goal is to resolve the situation, not to put others down or punish them. It has been our experience that problems between two people are almost always resolved in this first stage when things are done “by the book”.

So, Bob sits down with Sam and lovingly confronts him. “I bought this car based on your assurance that it had never been wrecked. I believe you owe me an explanation. And, I want to return the car for a full refund.” Bob deals with the situation factually, listing the specific offense and proposing a specific remedy. His goal is not to give Sam a piece of his mind, to get his anger off his chest, but to point out his wrongdoing and get it resolved both for his sake and for Sam's.

Jesus instructs that if he listens to you (in other words, if he takes to heart what you said and repents) then you have won your brother over. The matter would therefore be resolved. All would be over, nice and clean. No one else got involved. No gossip and rumors. It is handled privately, between two people. The situation, though embarrassing for Sam, should serve as a deterrent for any future temptations to swindle others.

B. Step 2

But what if that is not the outcome? What if Sam denies any wrongdoing? What if he digs his heels in and refuses to return Bob's money? What then does Bob do? We must move into the second stage as shown in verse 16.

BUT IF HE WILL NOT LISTEN, TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS ALONG, SO THAT 'EVERY MATTER MAY BE ESTABLISHED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES.

Here Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 16, a verse from the Old Testament Law that deals with settling disputes between two people. The number of people now involved in resolving the offense increases from two to four or five. But notice that it is still contained within a very small circle, on a "need-to-know" basis. Bob is not to run around telling others of how Sam ripped him off and is refusing to make it right. Again, this only complicates the process and hinders the goal.

Two or three others, carefully chosen, are now to go meet with Bob and Sam, not necessarily for the purpose of teaming up against Sam, or even mediating between Bob and Sam, but primarily for the purpose of establishing the facts. Those called in should have firsthand information and should be individuals respected by both Bob and Sam. They need to be wise and objective in approaching the situation and asking the right questions to get to the truth. It is possible that Sam is telling the truth and that there is a good explanation for what Bob has discovered.

Suppose Bob returns to meet with Sam, this time with Ed, a friend who was there when Sam sold the car to Bob, and Henry, an elder in the church. The repair records at a local body shop confirm that the car was wrecked and fixed, and that Sam knew this and even paid for it. Ed recalls the conversation and confirms that Sam lied to Bob. Henry, the elder, facilitates the meeting, making sure that emotions don't get out of hand and that each party is given an opportunity to make his case.

Eventually, it becomes clear that Sam did swindle Bob. Now that the facts are established, Sam has the choice either to admit his wrongdoing and make it right, or blow everyone off and do nothing. Henry reminds Sam of his obligation to be Christ-like in his business dealings and urges him to confess his sin, repent, seek forgiveness from Bob, and refund his money.

Occasionally the offending party will not necessarily dispute the facts, he just won't own up to his wrongdoing and make it right. The need to bring in two or three others becomes necessary, therefore, to turn up the heat and exhort him to do the right thing.

Very seldom is there a need to go any further. Most of the time disputes and offenses can be resolved within this second stage. But if a resolution is not achieved, then Jesus lays out before us a third step. Though it is difficult, He expects us to take it.

C. Step 3

If Sam becomes stubborn and refuses to admit his wrongdoing and make it right, then Sam has a serious problem that must be confronted in a serious way. The issue now is not even so much the shady business deal--though that is a problem--but Sam's unwillingness to make it right; it is Sam's defiance. Ultimately, it is his claiming to be a follower of Christ, yet acting and behaving in a way that contradicts his claim. This not only spoils his own personal testimony, but damages the testimony of the church to which he belongs.

Therefore, we follow the instructions in verse 17:

IF HE REFUSES TO LISTEN TO THEM, TELL IT TO THE CHURCH...

In step three, the circle of people involved increases from four or five individuals to the whole church body. Everyone is now asked to join in the effort of pleading with Sam and warning him in love.

Importantly, the purpose of informing the entire church is not to provide opportunities for gossip. Instead, the purpose is to restore Sam, as indicated later in verse 17:

AND IF HE REFUSES TO LISTEN EVEN TO THE CHURCH...

The church is to speak to him, not about him.

Jesus does not give us the details of how exactly the church is to be informed nor how each member should approach Sam. There are a variety of ways this could be accomplished.

One method is to have each person write Sam a personal letter. The tone of such a letter would not be judgmental and mean, but sobering and serious, one of pleading with him to repent from his defiance. If Sam had been a Sunday School teacher, perhaps a person might want to say how much he/she had appreciated his teachings and example, but is now disappointed to see his unwillingness to embrace those same teachings for himself.

The elders could also call for a day of fasting and provide direction on how to pray for Sam's repentance. There are a variety of measures that could be taken, all with the goal of restoration. When done in love and with a true desire for restoration, this third step should prove to be very effective. In fact, the simple threat of it alone should be quite a compelling motivator for anyone caught up in sin.

D. Step 4

The three steps here, articulated in verses 15, 16, and the first half of 17 are what we might call the "warning stages" of restoration. If Sam owns up to his wrongdoing and makes things right, the process is over. However, if he does not repent, he is acting as a pagan (i.e., a non-Christian) and the church will be forced to treat him as such.

The last half of verse 17 is clear:

**AND IF HE REFUSES TO LISTEN EVEN TO THE CHURCH, TREAT HIM AS YOU WOULD
A PAGAN OR A TAX COLLECTOR.**

If he remains resolved in his unwillingness, even to the point that he can ignore the pleadings and appeals of the whole church, then there is nothing more than can be done. The warning stage is over and it must be accepted that the church's responsibility in trying to convince him has been fulfilled. Jesus commands the church to move into the final stage. But even in this, the hope for restoration continues.

In step 4, the offending person is to be expelled from the church. Though this includes excommunication (removal from the membership rolls) it involves something much more. Jesus is calling the church body to show integrity in the way it regards those who are, and are not, members of the community of faith. The logic is as follows.

Since the person is claiming to be a servant of Christ, one of his followers, yet is behaving like he is not, and has now rejected all attempts to persuade him to do so, even refusing the voice of the whole church body itself, then he must be treated like the very person he is living as, "a pagan." His testimony has no credibility. He might think of himself as a Christian and call himself that, but other Christians cannot. They have to show integrity here and not join in the masquerade and further reinforce his own self-deception.

Importantly, the expressions used here in verse 17, "pagan" and "tax collector," are not to be understood as instructing that he be treated with contempt or hatred. He is to be loved but neither regarded nor treated as a believer. Such privileges, especially Christian fellowship with other believers, must now be denied. In this we are not necessarily talking about shunning, although some elements might appear to be similar. It means that we can't do things together that Christians do – pray together, worship together, talk about the Lord together, do Bible studies together and so forth, pretending that all is well when it isn't. With such a person there can be no genuine Christian unity, for there can be no unity without truth, and the guilty party has denied the truth.

For instance, how can you join hands together with him in prayer, thanking God for his grace, when that grace has been openly rejected by his behavior? How can you meet with him for a Bible study when he has declared by his actions that the Bible has no authority in his life?

Does this mean that you can't say "Hi" when you see Sam at Wal-Mart, and ask about the kids and his weekend at the lake? No, it doesn't mean that. Be friendly. Don't turn your back. But don't pretend that all is okay. There should be, even there in Aisle 4 at Wal-Mart, an appeal made. "You know Sam, we really do miss you. You are still in our prayers. Is there anything I can do to help you get out of this sin that has ensnared you? It is not worth losing your church family and your relationship with God over."

What takes place here in step 4 is what might be called a change of jurisdiction. Up to this point, the offender has been under our care, our authority, our oversight. God has expected His church to deal with the situation according to the guidelines He has given

us. Now that we have fulfilled all of that, it is time we remove him from under our umbrella and allow God to deal with him directly.

Imagine a police sergeant who is having problems with one of his officers. The sergeant has a handbook on how to deal with such situations. If he goes by the book, working through all the steps, but still has problems, then it is time to turn the officer over to the police chief himself.

Sadly, but necessarily, because the person has refused our warnings, he has, in that, broken fellowship with us. We must now formalize what has already occurred in his own choices.

E. The weight of these steps

As we move on to verse 18, we learn that this decision of excommunication is recognized by God Himself.

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH WILL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN, AND WHATEVER YOU LOOSE ON EARTH WILL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN.

While "binding and loosing" has become a charismatic free-for-all expression used to justify all sorts of bizarre practices in today's church, this verse is only properly understood in its literary and historical context. Verse 18 is making clear that the decisions of the church, when made in line with God's Word, carry divine authority and are honored in heaven. They are binding¹.

Verses 19 and 20 offer further consolation to those faced with the difficulty of having to excommunicate someone.

I TELL YOU THAT IF TWO OF YOU ON EARTH AGREE ABOUT ANYTHING YOU ASK FOR, IT WILL BE DONE FOR YOU BY MY FATHER IN HEAVEN. FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE COME TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I WITH THEM.

III. CONDITIONS FOR APPLICATION OF MATTHEW 18

It is natural to wonder, "What sorts of sins would prompt church discipline?" Would someone get rebuked in front of the church for habitual smoking, overeating, or too much TV watching? How far are we going to take this?

Just as abuse exists in the form of not going far enough and never confronting any sin, there is also abuse in the form of going too far and making a big deal out of things that are not deserving. Again, we can go to the Scriptures for direction.

The example given to us in Matthew 18 deals with sinning against other people. Jesus implies that it could be any reason for which another person has been harmed ("If your

brother sins against you"). It could be an insult, gossip, slander, a bad business deal, or any number of things. But the New Testament provides other examples of unrepentant sins that demand the same response from the church, and it may be assumed that these sins should be confronted when they become known, whether an offended party makes them known or they become known by some other means.

It is possible that Paul did not necessarily have the Matthew 18 procedure in mind in every case, but these verses are helpful in that they show us the kinds of sins that Paul wants the church to confront. If the offender refuses to repent, as we will see, he is either to be avoided or put outside the church (after appropriate warning is given).

A number of sins are listed in 1 Corinthians 5:

BUT NOW I AM WRITING YOU THAT YOU MUST NOT ASSOCIATE WITH ANYONE WHO CALLS HIMSELF A BROTHER BUT IS SEXUALLY IMMORAL OR GREEDY, AN IDOLATER OR A SLANDERER, A DRUNKARD OR A SWINDLER. WITH SUCH A MAN DO NOT EVEN EAT.

This should not be understood as a complete list. Rather, Paul is simply citing some examples of sins that are of serious nature and would require action if not repented of. At issue, once again, is someone's willingness, or lack thereof, to repent.

In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul adds that those who are idle and those who disobey apostolic teaching are not to be included in the fellowship of believers. In Rom. 16:7 and Titus 3:10, Paul instructs that those who persist in causing division are to be avoided. In each of these examples Paul gives basically the same command that Jesus does in Matthew 18: Do not have fellowship with the unrepentant person. Paul's purpose is to make certain that the churches do not in any way accommodate someone's claiming to be a believer while refusing to live like one. Yet there is never an eagerness to put someone out of fellowship. Even with a divisive person, Paul commands in Titus 3:10 that he first be given at least two warnings. There is ample opportunity for repentance.

Of course, there are many Scriptures that warn about false doctrine and many commands are given to rid the church of false teachers and false prophets. This, too, is an example of where the steps in Matthew 18 could be implemented.

IV. BIBLICAL CASE STUDY: OBSERVATIONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 5

In 1 Corinthians 5 we see a specific situation for which Paul prescribes church discipline. He scolds the church at Corinth for tolerating a member's illicit relationship with his stepmother. This particular sin is so perverse that even the pagans of the day would have considered it morally reprehensible, and it is a situation that the church at Corinth seems to parade as evidence of their liberty in Christ.

1 Corinthians 5:1-13 (NIV)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: a man has his father's wife. [2] And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? [3] Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. [4] When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, [5] hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

[6] Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? [7] Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. [8] Therefore let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

[9] I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- [10] not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. [11] But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

[12] What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? [13] God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

We will make seven important observations about this text relating to church discipline:

1. Paul's purpose here is not to lay out a procedure for them to follow. We can assume that they would already be familiar with the procedure that Jesus taught in Matthew 18. It is obvious that he is very agitated that they are letting this immorality continue and seems to be more troubled by that than by the actual incest going on.

Right away, we should notice that Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 make two distinct contributions to the matter of church discipline. We go to Matthew 18 to learn how to do it. We go to 1 Corinthians 5 to learn just how important it is for the church to address sin within its ranks and to see the priority God gives to the purity of the local body.

2. Let us put to rest, once and for all, the most common objection we hear to church discipline. Many are quick to quote two choice words of Jesus: "Judge not." But, Paul is very clear: "I have already passed judgment on the one who did this" (1 Cor. 5:3) and

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?" (1 Cor. 5:12).

We must understand that there are different kinds of judging. Jesus was condemning judging, but not all kinds of judging. His words are not to be understood as an absolute statement. In fact, in John 7:24, He actually commands His opponents to judge rightly.

Furthermore, the Scriptures tell us to exercise discernment in judging the teachings of others and evaluating the doctrines of those who claim to be prophets and teachers. We are also to judge the actions of fellow believers in light of God's Word. Indeed, to obey Christ's instructions in Matthew 18 requires that we judge the person who is in sin to be in the wrong. But, as Jesus warned in Matthew 7, this should not be done hypocritically.

3. It is significant that the actual expelling of the unrepentant offender is not to be done secretly, but during a formal meeting of the members, as seen in the words, "when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:4). It is essential that everyone receive the same facts at the same time to protect the one being expelled from false rumors, speculation, and gossip.

Paul exhorts the body to tell it like it is. Once again, the purpose of frank public disclosure is so everyone can participate in the warning process and so that the hope of restoration may continue on. As stated earlier, it is not public information to be broadcast to the whole town. It is an in-house matter and one that all are to be aware of and involved in.

4. The command to expel the offender and place him outside the community of believers is repeated no less than four times in this chapter (1 Cor. 5:2, 4-5, 7,13). This emphasis is an indication to us that we cannot flirt with the idea of alternative measures. Often, to maintain peace, church leaders will propose, "Let's not actually expel him, let's keep his name on the membership role. He may still come to worship services but we won't let him teach Sunday School or take communion." There is no biblical warrant for this type of compromise.

Now, if church discipline was primarily punishment we might discuss punishing people according to the seriousness of their offenses. But, as we have noted, church discipline is not punishment; it is restoration. If there is repentance, all is well. If all is well, there is no need for discipline. If, however, there is no repentance, nothing is well. Paul did not give the Corinthian church the option of replacing God's wisdom with their own, nor is this an option for us.

5. The seemingly harsh expression in verse 5, "hand this man over to Satan," refers to the "change of jurisdiction" mentioned here earlier. It is a change of who is now responsible for the offender's restoration. It is no longer the church, but God, who is free to use whatever means He will to work out His purposes, including hardship.

Indeed, when someone is expelled, he is placed in the devil's territory, severed from connection with God's people and the protection offered in the body. In contrast to the gathered community of those who experience the Spirit and power of the Lord Jesus in gifts of edification and loving concern for one another, the unrepentant man in 1 Corinthians 5 is to be put out into the world, transferred from the kingdom of God to the domain of the evil one.

The purpose and hope of this action is that being officially ostracized from the church will cause him such anguish that he will repent and forsake his wicked ways. He is not being turned over to Satan to be destroyed. Rather, it is his sinful nature that is to be destroyed. In other words, the defiance that is causing him to choose the path of sin over the path of life is what is to be overcome and defeated.

It should be noted that there is no implication in this text that the person expelled through church discipline is guaranteed eventually to repent. Still, the hope and prayers are for nothing less.

6. Finally, in verses 6-8 we see that the purpose of removing the offender is to clean out the old yeast so that the church might become a new loaf without yeast. In this case, yeast (or leaven) is a reference to sin and impurity. Not only must we love the offender enough to help him face his sin and repent, but we have an obligation to love the whole church enough to protect it from the spread of wickedness within its ranks.

V. CONCLUSION

We have considered what conditions will initiate the Matthew 18 process, but it needs to be stated that there is only one sin that will result in the removal of someone from fellowship: the refusal to repent.

Jesus commands that if the offender *refuses* to listen to you, take two or three others. If he *refuses* to listen to them, go to the whole church. If he *refuses* to listen even to the church, remove him from your fellowship. It is not the particular sin itself; it is the persistence in it, the refusal to stop it. Again, once there is repentance the process stops. If believers were excommunicated for their sins, even though they repented, who would be left in the church?

Finally, while church discipline is often viewed as mean and unloving, what is truly unloving is the refusal to apply it when needed. It is unloving to God, who instructs us that if we love Him we will obey His commands (Jn. 14:15). It is also unloving to the brother who is caught up in sin, because failing to apply church discipline is saying to him, "We care more about our own comfort and peace than your spiritual well-being. Continue unhindered in the sin that is destroying you." Therefore, we commit ourselves to obeying God's clear instruction and to love as it relates to the restoration process.

¹The expressions “binding” and “loosing” were used by the rabbis of that day when pronouncing judgments upon certain policies and decisions they were faced with. Someone might have queried, “Rabbi, may a man walk his donkey on the Sabbath, not to work, but to exercise?” When a rabbi bound something it meant that he forbade it. When a rabbi loosed something it meant that he permitted it. Jesus draws upon this principle, familiar to those in the original setting, stating that those judgments, pronouncements, and decisions made by his church, when done according to His word, will be acknowledged and honored by God in heaven.

Here, we are given assurance that Christ, the true head of the church, will be in our midst, giving us help. Of all the places to find this promise, it is especially comforting to have it here; the Lord promises help in dealing with these sorts of difficult situations.

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THE LORD’S SUPPER

Who should come to the table and who should not?

I. INTRODUCTION

While the New Testament contains several passages that speak of the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 11:17-34 is the only one where the subject is dealt with didactically, that is, where specific instructions are given.

The material presented here was first delivered in a five-part series in 2001 (those tapes are still available). The objective is to summarize those teachings and provide a clear explanation of 1 Cor. 11:17-34. Space will not allow for a detailed exegesis of each sentence of each verse. While that would be useful, it is not required to understand Paul’s teaching in this passage. For further study we would recommend Gordon Fee’s commentary on 1 Corinthians. His research on the historical background of the city of Corinth and the particular issues in its church are especially helpful.

Simply put, the goal of this material is to resolve any confusion about who should go to the table and who should not.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

[17] In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. [18] In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. [19] No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. [20] When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, [21] for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

[22] Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." [26] For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[27] Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. [28] A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. [31] But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. [32] When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

[33] So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. [34] If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE CORINTHIAN SITUATION

Historical and Cultural Context

1. When we examine all the information we have about the practice of the Lord's Supper in the early church, we see that it was originally eaten in conjunction with a larger meal. This is the only way to explain verses 20, 21, and 34. Other passages in the New Testament that support this include Matt. 26:26, Acts 2:42-46, Acts 20:7, and Jude 12. It was not merely a little wafer and an oversized thimble. Rather, it was a full meal that included bread and wine.

The 1 Corinthians 11 passage alone informs us that whatever was served could satisfy one's hunger. In fact, it could actually satisfy too much. Thus, the rebukes about drunkenness and gluttony.

2. We also know that the early church met in homes. Those with big enough homes to accommodate everyone were the wealthier members.

3. Also, from the information we have about the customs of that day, we know that the person who offered his home for these meetings and meals would most likely be the

one responsible for providing the meal as well (though this may not have been the case with every meal). Perhaps the host of the home church didn't provide all the food, but he would have most likely provided the main dish. At the very least, this expense would have been shared among those members who had the means to provide.

4. Archeology has shown us that the dining room in such homes would scarcely accommodate many guests. Even the wealthy would have had limited space. The majority of the church members, therefore, would eat in the courtyard, which would still seat only about 30 to 50 guests on average. A modern image comes to mind of tables and chairs being set up on the back porch, in the garage, the driveway, the pole barn, and so forth.

5. Finally, and significantly, the city of Corinth itself was a class-conscious society. The rich socialized with the rich and the poor with the poor. No one thought anything about it. Therefore, it would have been natural for the host to invite those of his own class into the dining room while those of lower status ate outside. It was the "proper" and customary way to do things in a city that was much more Roman than Jewish.

In summary, homes and meals were provided by the wealthy. Homes were limited in space. The wealthy ate with the wealthy inside, while the others ate separately outside, or waited until the wealthy were finished. These facts help us understand Paul's rebuke and his instructions.

Identifying the Offense

Basically, there is one abuse here at Corinth, but it moves in two directions: horizontally and vertically. It is horizontal in the sense that it humiliated others in the church, namely the poor. The offense was also vertical because it showed contempt toward Christ's death, as will be explained later.

In verse 22, Paul condemns the Corinthians for observing the Lord's Supper in a manner that despised God's church and humiliated the poor. Because they were sinning against each other, they were also sinning against the One who had joined them together. They were showing contempt for that which was the basis for their unity, namely, the death of their Savior.

Paul complains in verse 21, "Each one goes ahead with his own meal." The words "his own meal" emphasize that this was not what it was supposed to be. It was supposed to be a community meal, all sharing equally together. Instead, because of this division between the "haves" and "have nots," some remained hungry, while others helped themselves.

The Lord's Supper was intended to be a simple common meal in which everyone shared equally for the purpose of remembering and proclaiming the Lord's death. This is why Paul says in verse 20, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat." In other words, they had ruined it to the point that it wasn't even the Lord's Supper at all. They put the emphasis on eating and not on remembering.

It is important to realize that Paul does not rebuke the wealthy for being wealthy, nor does he try to eliminate the social distinctions. Instead, he forbids them from bringing those distinctions to the common meal of the believers where Christ has made them all one, signified by their all eating “one loaf.”

In the previous chapter, Paul emphasized that this is one meal. One loaf. One cup. It was not, and is not now, supposed to be “one’s own meal.”

By going first and eating the privileged portions (in front of the less fortunate) the rich were despising the church by humiliating those who were their brothers and one with them in Christ. In this, the gospel itself was being despised— a gospel that proclaims that all who are in Christ are brothers and sisters of equal standing.

When the church meets, as one body in Christ, to eat from one loaf and give a visible witness to our unity, it is specifically to proclaim Christ’s death and remember what he did for us. Therefore, its significance is not in the food itself, but that which the food symbolizes.

When we show equal concern for each other in a way that befuddles the world, we proclaim Christ’s death, because it is Christ’s death that has made us one. Nothing but Christ’s death can explain our bond of love. When we don’t act like a community of love, we proclaim the opposite message: that Christ’s death means nothing, accomplished nothing, and is worth nothing, because, by our worldly behavior, all can see that it changed nothing.

Because Christ loves us, we love him. And because we love him, we love those he loves. We love each other. The infinite love enjoyed within the Trinity from eternity past is now a love that we literally participate in. It is this love that unites us, and this love works in us because of Christ’s death. Had Jesus not died, there would be no reason for us to come together in such a spirit of oneness.

So when we live and move in that love, we testify to the remarkable quality of Christ’s death to bring people together in an unexplainable bond. The Corinthians had failed to do this. By humiliating the poor and despising God’s church, they committed the offense of failing to proclaim Christ’s death.

An Unworthy Manner

Almost everyone has had the experience of not feeling worthy to take communion. Maybe you have lost your temper with a family member on the way to church. Maybe you hadn’t prayed or studied the Bible much throughout the week. Maybe you gave in to some old temptations. Then Sunday rolls around and you read in 1 Cor. 11:28 that one should examine himself before participating in the Lord’s Supper. Should you take communion or not?

Paul's command in verse 28, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks the cup," has caused many Christians to refrain from partaking of the Lord's Supper. There is a sense that one must pass a personal spiritual inventory test.

We go on to read about eating and drinking judgment on oneself and even getting sick and perhaps dying. Therefore, Christians are often told to sit still for a moment and do some quiet introspection and analyze their walk with God to determine whether they are worthy to go to the table or not.

Verse 27 warns against eating and drinking in an "unworthy manner." This also has led some to think that Paul is referring to one's personal worthiness. The King James Version (which many of us grew up with) seems to suggest this by using the word "unworthily." However, Paul cannot possibly be referring to one's personal worthiness because, in fact, none of us is worthy. Rather, we are all equally unworthy. And that is the beautiful irony of this. This is a table that symbolizes God's grace: what he did for us in spite of our unworthiness.

In verse 26, Paul says that the Lord's Supper is a proclamation about Jesus and his death. It is not a proclamation of anything to do with me, my walk with God, my worthiness to partake, or my self-examination. None of that. It is a statement about Him.

Let's look more closely at a phrase that is often misunderstood and misapplied. Verse 27 reads, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." Unfortunately, the KJV and NLT both use the adverb "unworthily." But this is not the best word and it is even somewhat misleading. It is not the *person* who partakes of the Lord's Supper who is unworthy. Instead, it is the manner. It is the way in which the person partakes that is unworthy.

In fact, everyone is equally worthy (rather, equally *unworthy*). Even the rich who despised and humiliated the poor are no more unworthy than the poor they despised. Again, the Lord's Supper is not a proclamation about me, but about Jesus.

The question here is simply this: Does the manner in which the Lord's Supper is observed result in a remembering and proclaiming of the Lord's death, or not? If there is disunity or division then it is not.

Sinning Against the Body and Blood

How then does one become guilty of "sinning against the body and blood of the Lord"? We should first note that the expression "body and blood of the Lord" is simply a reference to the death of Jesus. Paul is not trying to give any unusual or special significance to the bread and wine as though there is something especially sacred or mystical about them. They are simply symbols that represent Christ's body and blood. His concern is how the participants "remember" Christ through the bread and wine, not the bread and wine itself.

In the preceding verses, Paul quotes Jesus' expressions "body" and "blood," given in reference to his death in establishing the new covenant. So Paul simply hooks into Christ's own language as he tries to convey just how serious their sin is. The sin is a sin against Christ himself, for it is a corruption of how his death is to be proclaimed.

The words "sinning against" are not in the original language and have been added by some translators to make it read more smoothly. Fortunately, some translations, like the New American Standard and the King James do not add these words, and they simply read: "...whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." The key word here is "guilty." In the Greek, that word is actually a technical legal term used to express liability. It literally means, "will have to answer for."

So, this sentence could actually read something like, "Therefore, whoever participates in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner will share in the liability of Christ's death." In other words, when one displays such great disrespect as this, he places himself under the same liability as those responsible for that death in the first place. He is no better off than Judas who betrayed Jesus, nor Pilate who sentenced Him, nor those who conspired against Him. He who participates in an unworthy manner has shown the same contempt for Christ.

Coming to the table with disunity and divisions is not only a sin against those in the church but is also a sin against the head of that church, Jesus. As Paul said earlier to the Corinthians in 8:12, if you sin against your brother, you sin against Christ.

So here is a question every person and every church must ask: Is the significance of our Savior's death exalted, or ignored? And not just at the table, but in everything the church does? To repeat, when we don't act like a community of love, we proclaim that Christ's death means nothing, accomplished nothing, and is worth nothing, because truly, it changed nothing.

Examining Oneself

Paul adds in verse 28, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup." These words are not intended to be understood as a call for deep personal introspection to determine whether one is worthy of the table. It is, rather, a call to repentance, a call to unity, a call to remember that we, the church, are one body in Christ. It is a call to renounce those things that would impede and hinder such unity or, more specifically, anything that would injure a true proclamation of what has been accomplished in Christ's death.

Our behavior is not to contradict the very gospel we proclaim. Before we participate in the Lord's Supper, we should check our attitudes toward the church body itself, and consider how we treat others, and see if we are showing equal concern to each other.

We must then accept the challenge to repent of anything that would injure the unity of the body, be it unforgiveness, or pride, or selfishness, or prejudice, or arrogance, or gossip, or backbiting.

This table reminds me that Christ has extended grace to me. Do I, likewise, extend grace to others? If not, then I am to do so. Importantly, if the self-examination reveals sin, the solution is repentance, not abstaining from the Lord's Supper. Paul does not tell them, "Stay away from the table."

Recognizing the Body

Paul warns in verse 29, "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." The key to avoiding the confusion that has long surrounded this verse is answering the question: What body? Is Paul referring to the physical flesh of Jesus or the church body of believers?

First, consider the context of the passage. Paul's consistent concern is the body of believers, not simply in 11:17-34 but throughout the chapter and, indeed, the entire letter.

In addition, the prepositional phrase "of the Lord" found in the NIV, is not in the original language. It should simply read, "the body." It should be noted that each time Paul uses the expression "the body," that expression by itself, without the phrase "of the Lord" and without any reference to the blood (as is the case here), he always has the church body of believers in mind, not Christ's physical flesh.

Judgment

The essence of verse 29 is basically this: "For anyone who participates in the Lord's supper, not being mindful of the intended unity of the church, eats and drinks judgment on himself."

"Not being mindful" means failing to recognize the significance of this unity. It is failing to honor each other in genuine fellowship, not appreciating what Christ did to secure this unity.

The section begins with Paul scolding the Corinthians in verse 22 for despising the church. Now, in verse 29 he tells them what to do about it: discern the church. In fact, on the heels of this passage, in the next chapter, Paul spends considerable effort driving home this very point, that the church is the body of Christ.

In verse 30, we see that the judgment Paul warns of in verse 29 has already begun in their midst. Paul steps into a prophetic role and, by the Spirit, observes a divine cause for some of the illnesses and deaths among them.

We must be careful about trying to impose a universal application here. The text does not teach that anyone, anywhere, at any time, who partakes of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner will get sick and might even die (nor should we assume such

judgment cannot occur). Paul is simply commenting on their situation. He is providing an explanation for them.

Paul also offers the solution in verse 31: “But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.” If the Corinthians had been judging (i.e., examining) themselves they would have honored the intent of the Lord’s Supper by proclaiming Christ’s death through their love for each other. Then such judgments would not have fallen upon them. But the judgments that did come were for their good, not to punish them with God’s wrath but to wake them up, as Paul explains in the next verse.

The remedy is quite plain and simple: Wait for each other. And if you are hungry, eat at home first. Once again, it is not, “Don’t go to the table.” *Do* go to the table, but do so rightly (i.e., in a worthy manner). The expression “wait for each other” is a bit difficult to translate, and could very well mean “welcome each other” or even “receive each other.” Either of those possibilities would fit the context. The bottom line is this: They are to have equal concern for each other (an important subject to which Paul devotes much of the next chapter).

III. CONCLUSION

Who should come to the table? Simply stated, all believers. How should they come? In a worthy manner, that is, recognizing that Christ’s death means something, for it has changed our lives, especially in the way we relate to others.