

EXCOMMUNICATION
— AND —
SHUNNING,
IS IT BIBLICAL



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Excommunication and Shunning

Introduction:

Some people will read this booklet and feel upset, maybe even angry. Others will read it with an open mind, think about what is being said, and may even walk away feeling like they learned something new.

Before you react, please consider two important thoughts.

First, I am willing to listen and be challenged by what you believe about excommunication and shunning.

Second, remember this. In the end, God will have the last word. Because of that, we will be much better off if we build our beliefs on God's unchanging Word, not our own ideas or traditions.

Excommunication and shunning were some of the main reasons Jacob Amman, founder of the Amish people, separated from the Mennonites in the late 1600s. Before we study this topic, let us look at some of that history.

Division Between Jacob Amman and Hans Reist



The year was 1690. Two leaders in the Mennonite church began to disagree about certain practices. Their names were Hans Reist and Jacob Amman.

Their disagreement grew over time. It was not just about small issues. It became a serious conflict about church discipline and how strict it should be.

In 1693, during a conflict with Reist's followers, Amman excommunicated Reist and his leaders. This shocked Mennonite communities across Western Europe and caused deep division.

Families, friends, and churches were affected. The division was not just spiritual. It also broke relationships.

Years later, after nearly half of the Mennonites had been excommunicated and shunned, some began to reason with Amman. He began to see the damage that had been done.

After much thought and searching his heart, he and some of his leaders tried to bring the church back together.

To show repentance, Jacob Amman even excommunicated himself and his leaders. In 1699 and again in 1700, he tried to reunite with the Mennonites.

But the Mennonites believed it could not work because of ongoing differences in doctrine and tradition. The division remained.

Some Facts About Jacob Amman

- Jacob Amman excommunicated over half of the Mennonites.
- The Mennonites excommunicated Jacob Amman.
- Jacob Amman later excommunicated himself from his own group.
- Jacob Ammon, founder of the Amish people, died while still separated from the Mennonites.

Is Excommunication and Shunning Biblical?

People usually answer this question in one of three ways. The first two views go to opposite extremes. The third view is more balanced and based on Scripture.

Let us look at all three.

View #1

Some churches, mostly non-Amish, ignore the Bible's teaching on discipline. They do not practice correction or excommunication at all.

When sin shows up, it is often overlooked, excused, or quietly ignored. Leaders may talk about grace but, avoid dealing with clear wrongdoing.

If a pastor or elders try to address sin, they may lose tithing members. In some cases, they may even face complaints or legal pressure. Because of this, many churches choose to stay silent. They want to keep peace, protect their reputation, and avoid conflict.

Over time, this creates a serious problem.

A person who causes division or lives in ongoing sin may move from one church to another. He causes trouble, then leaves when things get uncomfortable, and goes somewhere else. Because many churches are not closely connected, no one knows his history. The same pattern repeats again and again.

This not only harms individuals, it weakens the whole church.

Leaders may become afraid to speak the truth. Members may begin to think sin is not serious. What once would have been corrected is now accepted.

Slowly, the church loses its strength, its purity, and its witness to the world.

Instead of being a place of truth and transformation, it becomes a place where sin is tolerated and conviction is missing.

The Bible warns us about this.

1 Corinthians 5:6

"...know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

Leaven is like yeast. It only takes a small amount yeast to spread through the whole batch of dough.



Leavened
Bread



Unleavened
Bread

In the same way, one unaddressed sin can begin to influence an entire church. At first, it may seem small or unimportant. But over time, it spreads into attitudes, actions, and beliefs. In time it can bring the entire church down.

May I remind the church, living and practicing under View 1, that the Bible has some clear words written for you.

1 Corinthians 5:7

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump...

To “purge out” means to remove something completely. Paul is telling the church not to hold on to sin, but to deal with it and put it away.

Let’s consider an Old Testament story that took place in Joshua chapter 7. After God had given Israel a great victory over the City of Jericho, He gave a clear command. The people were not to take any spoils whatsoever from the city. Everything belonged to the Lord. But Achan, disobeyed. When no one was looking, he took a Babylonian garment, silver, and gold, and hid them in his tent.

Joshua 7 tells us that when this **ONE man**, Achan, sinned, the **WHOLE** nation suffered the consequences. Achan thought his sin was hidden, and it was from men, but not from God.

Joshua 7:10-12

*And the LORD said unto Joshua...**Israel** hath sinned, and **they** have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for **they** have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and **they** have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore, the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because **they** were accursed: **neither will I be with you anymore, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.***



Because of ONE man's act of disobedience, God's presence was no longer with the entire nation of Israel in the same way. When they went into battle, they did not have His help, and the Bible says that thirty-six innocent men died.

While Achan and the events in the Old Testament took place under a different covenant, and the New Testament church is not under the same system, the lesson still teaches us something very important.

Sin is not just personal. What we do in secret can bring harm to those around us.

It also shows us that God sees what is hidden. Even when others do not know, He knows. And He cares about the purity of His people.

That is why God takes sin seriously. And that is why it must be dealt with in the right way, with truth, humility, and a desire to restore.

When sin is confessed and removed, God's blessing can return. But when sin is hidden and protected, it brings loss, weakness, and defeat to an entire church family.

Could this be one reason we see so little power in American churches today?

View #2

The practice of excommunication and shunning in this second view is just as extreme as the first, but in the other direction.



This view and practice began with Jacob Amman when he separated from the Mennonites in the late 1600s. Since that time, it has been passed down and still exists today, though it may vary from one Amish community to another.

Sadly, the use of excommunication and shunning has been used as control

and sometimes even as a weapon. Instead of being applied in a careful and biblical way, they have caused deep emotional and mental pain.

When discipline is handled this way, it no longer reflects the heart of Scripture, which is meant to bring restoration, not harm.

These legalistic churches of which I am referring to often use Scriptures, such as Matthew 18:15-17, Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15, Titus 3:10-11 and 1 Timothy 1:20, to warn members about the serious consequences of going against church rules and traditions handed down by their forefathers and church leaders.

For many, this creates a strong fear of stepping out of line, even when questions or concerns may be sincere.

If a member is excommunicated, he or she becomes a marked person. From that point on, they are often avoided and shunned, not only by their own family and church, but also by many other Amish communities.

In most cases, the only way for the ban to be lifted and the shunning to end, is for that person to return to the same church district that excommunicated them and publicly repent. Without that, the separation often remains in place indefinitely.

Over the years, there have been cases where members who were shunned by the church felt such deep emotional pain and hopelessness that they believed they had no way out. Some have even taken their own lives. I have personally attended funerals like this.

In some Amish communities, those individuals are buried outside the cemetery fence, without a headstone. Those who remain are told that the person is lost and has gone to hell.

This is very serious and deeply heartbreaking. It should cause us to stop and think carefully about how discipline is being practiced, and whether it truly reflects the heart of God.

To leave the Amish church meant being cut off from family, friends, and community. They were told they would be turned over to Satan and, in the end, cast into hell for disobeying the church and its rules.

At the same time, staying within the system could feel just as dark and overwhelming.

Feeling stuck between these two paths, with no hope in sight, some believed there was no way forward.

This kind of pain should not be ignored. It should move us to ask serious questions about how biblical truth, grace, and discipline are being lived out.

Questions to Consider

Does God give the ministers of the church full authority to establish any rule they want and then require all members to follow it?

Does God allow church leaders, under any circumstances, to turn a person over to Satan and shun him or her?

Is there a difference between a man-made rule, such as, “Thou shalt not drive a car,” and a God-given command, such as, “Thou shalt not commit adultery?”

These are serious questions that deserve honest answers.

The answer should seem clear. Most readers would agree that when God’s commands are broken, there are real consequences. God’s Word carries full authority.

On the other hand, do man-made rules carry that same authority? Should they be treated the same as the commands of God?

These are important questions we must answer if we want to follow the Word of God and not just another made-up system.

Suppose I was an elder in the church, and one day I came to you and said, “John, from now on, I do not want you to use any power tools, including a chain saw, power drill, or air-nailer.”

Then suppose I came to you a second time and said, “John, from now on:

- You are only allowed to wear certain colors of clothing.
- Your shirt can only have three buttons in the front, no lay-down collar, and no short sleeves.
- Kerosene lanterns on your buggy are acceptable, but battery-operated blinking lights are not.
- A phone shanty at the end of your lane is allowed, but a phone inside your home is not.
- You must shave your mustache, but your beard must remain uncut.
- A couch in the living room may be allowed, but it cannot have certain features, such as armrests or a full back.
- Running a washing machine with a gasoline engine is acceptable, but using electricity to do the same thing is considered wrong.
- You must own and use horse and buggy for transportation but not a car.”

Once again, when we look at rules like these, we have to ask an honest question. Are these commands biblically based? Are they from God, or are they part of a greater system put together by men?

This is where the issue becomes very serious. When man-made rules are treated as if they carry the same authority as God’s Word, people can become confused. They may begin to fear breaking man-made rules more than disobeying God’s commandments.

Most would agree that God's commands are clearly given in Scripture. They deal with matters of the heart, such as gossip, bitterness, slander, pride, lust, anger, and many other hidden sins.

Man-made rules, on the other hand, often focus on outward things, such as clothing styles, buggy designs, furniture choices, technology use, and other daily practices.



Because of this, we must be very careful not to place the same weight on both. God's commandments and the commandments of men are not equal, and they should never be treated as if they are.

A sincere Amish man might say, "We do not believe that keeping our man-made rules will get us to heaven."

A good follow-up question would be, "If the rules do not get John to heaven, then what happens if he chooses not keep them?"

If the sincere Amish man answers honestly, he would have to say, "Then the church mWst take action and excommunicate and shun that member."

That leads to an important question.

Excommunicate that member for what? For breaking a man-made rule?

Dear friend, what I just laid out for you is exactly what was happening in Jesus' day.

By the time of Jesus, the religious leaders, especially the Pharisees, had added **hundreds of extra rules** to the Law of Moses.

The written Law (the Old Testament commands) is often counted as **613 commandments**.

But around that, the Pharisees built what they called a "fence" to protect the law. These were man-made rules, later written down in what is called the **Mishnah** and **Talmud**.

For example:

- There were **39 categories of work** forbidden on the Sabbath
- Each category had many detailed sub-rules
- Some teachers said there were **over 1,500 additional Sabbath regulations alone**

While we cannot give one exact total, it is safe to say:

They added **hundreds, even thousands, of detailed man-made rules** on top of God's law.

That is why Jesus rebuked them so strongly:

Matthew 23:4

“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders...”

Mark 7:6–9

*He (Jesus) answered and said unto them, well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people **honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.** Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For **laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men**, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well **ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.***

The religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, created many man-made rules to try to keep people from breaking God's commandments. At first, these rules may have seemed helpful. But over time, those rules became more important than God and His commands.

Jesus spoke directly to this problem. He said, “...*ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition*” (Mark 7:9).



Throughout the Gospels and the book of Acts, we see that these man-made rules became the very reason Jesus and the apostles were rejected and cast out of the Jewish synagogues.

Many of Christ's followers were later persecuted. Some were thrown into prison. Some were stoned. Some were beheaded. Others suffered greatly for their faith.

These things should not surprise us, because Jesus warned that this would happen.

John 16:2

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”

How sad it is when leaders, who are called to teach and preach God's Word, turn against their own people and cast them out. And not because they broke God's commands, but because they did not follow their man-made system, handed down by the forefathers.

Think about what happened to Jesus Himself.

He stood before Pilate with a crown of thorns on His head. His own people accused Him and demanded His death.

John 19:6–7

*“When the chief priests... cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him... Pilate saith unto them... I find no fault in Him. The Jews answered him, **we have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.**”*



In simple terms, the leaders were saying, “We have our own rules, and this man, the Son of God, does not fit them. Therefore, we want Him dead.”

This is what can happen when man-made rules are lifted above the Word of God.

Questions to Consider

Would the Son of God measure up to your church standards?

What would happen if Jesus attended your services next Sunday and asked to become a member of the church?

Would He be allowed to join if he wore English or African clothing styles?

What if He chose to drive a car, own a cell phone, and put electricity in his house? Would He still be allowed to become a member of your church?

These are serious questions.

The truth is, if Jesus attended many churches today, and He did not look Amish, act Amish, or speak Amish, He would likely be noticed right away.

Some might begin to focus on outward things. They might say, “He came without a hat. His clothing is not like ours. He even has a mustache.”

Others might question His name. “He calls Himself Jesus. That is not an Amish name. If He wants to be part of us, he should choose a more familiar name, like Eli or Amos.”

In a situation like this, the focus would not be on who He is, but on how He looks and whether He fits the system.

Jesus had strong words for this kind of judgment and condemnation:

Matthew 23:13

“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”

Matthew 23:24

“Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.”

Jesus was pointing out a serious problem.

- They were focused on small, outward issues, while ignoring much greater matters of the heart.
- They were quick to judge others, but slow to see their own sin.
- They made strict rules for others, yet failed to follow God’s true commands themselves.

Because of this, they were not helping people come to God. Instead, they were putting up barriers that kept people away.

This brings us to a very important question:

**So, when is it right to excommunicate
and shun a member of the church?**

View #3

One thing is certain. Wherever there are people, there will be sin and disagreement. It is bound to happen.

Someone once said, “If you find a perfect church, do not join it, because the moment you do, it will no longer be perfect.”

We must be careful not to point fingers too quickly at others. It is easy to forget the truth, “But for the grace of God, there go I.”

You may not struggle with lust, and you may never have come close to committing adultery. But perhaps you struggle with anger, pride, or bitterness.

Every person has weaknesses. And given the right time and situation, those weaknesses can show up.

Jesus warned us about this very thing.

Matthew 7:3-5

"And why beholdest thou the mote (sliver) that is in thy brother's eye, but considers not the beam (log) that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote (sliver) out of thine eye; and behold, a beam (log) is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam (log) out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote (sliver) out of thy brother's eye."

Most of us would be wise to read and study this passage carefully before taking any action.

However, there are times when a born-again member of the church makes a poor choice and becomes entangled in sin, such as the sins listed in Galatians 5:19–21.



When that happens, I believe we must stop and ask ourselves two important questions before we, as a church, take any action toward that person.

- #1** Was this a one-time failure, or is it a repeated pattern of sin?
- #2** Has the person shown true sorrow and repentance for what they have done, or are they filled with pride and unwilling to change?

Suppose the person is truly sorry for the sin they committed and asks both God and the church for forgiveness.

What should the church do in that situation?

- Should they immediately forgive that person and move on?
- Or should they forgive, but still require excommunication and a period of shunning to “prove” that the repentance is real?

These are important questions. How we answer them will show whether we are following Scripture or simply following tradition.

Let’s turn to the Scriptures for our answer:

Scenario #1:

Dealing with Sin in the Church

1 Corinthians 5:11

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”

In 1 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul addresses a serious problem in the church. A man was living in open sin, a kind of sin that even unbelievers would recognize as wrong. Instead of dealing with it, the church had become proud and had done nothing.

1 Corinthians 5:1

“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you...”

This sin was not hidden. It was known by the church and yet ignored. Paul’s concern was not only the sin itself, but also the church’s response.

1 Corinthians 5:2

“And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned...”

They should have been grieved, but instead they were careless. Paul then gives clear instruction. The man living in open, unrepentant sin was to be removed from fellowship.

1 Corinthians 5:5

“To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved...”

This may sound harsh, but the goal is not punishment. The goal is restoration. By removing the sinner from fellowship, he would feel the weight of his sin and hopefully turn back to God. In the very same chapter of the Bible, Paul explains why this is necessary.

1 Corinthians 5:6

“...Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”

Sin spreads. If it is not dealt with, it will affect the whole church.

That is why Paul says:

1 Corinthians 5:7

“Purge out therefore the old leaven...”

The church must deal with open, ongoing sin, not out of anger, but out of love for both the person and the church body. Paul also makes an important distinction. He is not telling believers to separate from all sinners in the world.

1 Corinthians 5:10

“Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world...”

We live in a sinful world, and we cannot avoid contact with unbelievers.

But inside the church body, things are different.

1 Corinthians 5:11

“...if any man that is called a brother...”

This is very important. Paul is speaking about someone who claims to be a believer.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul lists serious sins:

- Fornicator (sexual sin outside of marriage)
- Covetous (greedy, always wanting more)
- Idolater (putting something before God)
- Railer (abusive or hurtful speech)
- Drunkard (given to alcohol)
- Extortioner (cheating or taking advantage of others)

These are not man-made rules. These are **clear sins condemned by God in Scripture**. That is why Paul says, *“not to keep company... with such an one no not to eat”* (1 Corinthians 5:1).

This means believers are not to continue normal, close fellowship with someone who claims to follow Christ but refuses to turn from clear, ongoing sin. Why?

Not to be harsh, but to make a clear statement:

- This behavior is not in line with following Christ
- The person needs to see the seriousness of their sin
- The goal is to lead them to repentance and restoration

This kind of discipline is not – should never be – for someone who is broken and repentant. It is for someone who continues in sin without sorrow.

At the same time, this chapter, 1 Corinthians 5, must be understood alongside other Scriptures, such as Matthew 18, which lay out the proper steps and spirit of restoration.

Everything must be done in truth, humility, and love, with the goal of bringing the person back to God.

Scenario #2: **A Woman Caught in Adultery**

John 8:3–5

“And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman (of the church) taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?”

This woman was caught in the very act of adultery. And the religious (church) leaders were quick to act. They brought her out in public and pointed to the law of Moses, saying, “This woman deserves to be stoned.”

To the leaders, her guilt was clear, and they were ready to judge her. But their focus was not on mercy or restoration.

Now let us see how the Lord Jesus handled the matter:

John 8:6–11

“...Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not. So when they continued asking Him, He lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among

you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up Himself, and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

I would like to point out two important things about how Jesus responded in this passage:

First, Jesus did not say, "Woman, because of your sin, I am going to have the synagogue excommunicate and shun you for a period of time. We will watch you closely to see if your repentance is real."



That is not how Jesus dealt with her!

Second, Jesus did not condemn her, nor did He question her sincerity. Instead, He showed her mercy and gave her a second chance.

He did not ignore her sin, but He also did not place extra burdens on her. He simply said, "Go, and sin no more."

Aren't you thankful that we serve a God of mercy, love, and second chances? And not just second chances, but many chances.

Luke 17:4

"And if he trespasses against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

Consider: If God requires us to forgive the same person seven times in a day, so will He.

Listen! God's heart is not to cast people away, but to forgive, restore, and give them the opportunity to walk in a different direction.

Scenario #3: **Dealing with Personal Offenses**

Suppose a member of your church offends you personally. At this point, no one else in the church knows about it.

What should you do?

1. Should you go behind that person's back and tell the deacon, so he can pass it on to the bishop, the rest of the elders, and the church?
2. Should you begin talking about it with others in the community, letting everyone know what happened?
3. Should you simply forgive and say nothing to anyone?

Let us again consider the words of our Lord Jesus, as He gives clear guidelines for these very situations. Notice that there are three simple steps, listed for us in Matthew 18, in dealing with a sinning church member.



Step 1: *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him about his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”*

Step 2: *“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”*

Step 3: *“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”* (Matthew 18:15-17)

Jesus could not have made it much clearer. These are three simple, step-by-step instructions for dealing with personal offenses.

Notice this carefully. It is not until the final step that the matter is brought before the whole church.

If we understand Jesus correctly, only after these steps have been followed, and only if there is still no repentance, **should the offended person** begin to treat the individual as an unbeliever.

Let us ask ourselves another important question:

According to Jesus in Matthew 18, would treating the sinner as an unbeliever have been necessary if the person had repented at step one? Or at step two?

The answer should be clear. According to Jesus’ own words, a person is not to be treated as an unbeliever unless all three steps have been followed, and there is still no sign of personal repentance and sorrow.

We must also be honest about this. It does not work to skip steps, or to start with steps two and three before step one. Yet that is often what happens in many plain churches today. Not only does it fail, but it is also not how God designed it to be.

Well, there are a few more scenarios I want to touch on, concerning church discipline. Here they are:

Scenario #4:

Dealing with Division and Personal Offences

Romans 16:17–18

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

The first question we should ask is this after reading this passage:

- Which person in the church are we to mark and avoid?

The answer is clear. It is the one who causes division and teaches things that go against what has already been taught.

But this leads to another important question:

- Who did the teaching, and what was taught?

This question demands an answer before we go any further.

If the teaching is based on man-made rules and traditions, then neither the church nor its leaders have the right to mark and avoid someone for not following those rules. If they do, they are sinning against God.

The Word of God is the same for everyone, all generations, and for every culture in the world, whether Amish, Mennonite, Hutterite, or English. We have only one true measuring stick, and that is the Word of God. Man-made systems will differ from group to group, but God's Word does not change.

When Paul wrote, *"mark them which cause divisions... contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned,"* he was referring to the truth he had already taught them previously in the Book of Romans.

The moment we go beyond what Paul taught and begin adding our own preferences, we step outside of God's will. We begin to take matters into our own hands.

And when that happens, there is confusion, inconsistency, and division from one group to another.

In the end, it leads us away from biblical truth, not toward it.

Scenario #5:

Withdraw Yourself From Those Who Stop Following Our Traditions

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15

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

*And if any man obeys not our word by this epistle, **note that man, and have no company with him**, that he may be ashamed. Yet **count him not as an enemy** but admonish him as a brother.*

Let us ask a few simple questions:

- Who are we to withdraw ourselves from?
- Who are we to note, have no company with, and separate from?

The answer is found in the passage itself: **"...if any man obeys not OUR word by THIS epistle..."**

Paul is not talking about someone breaking man-made rules or traditions. He is talking about someone who rejects the truth that was taught by the apostles.

This is very important. As church leaders and teachers, we will be held accountable before God one day.

If you are part of disciplining church members who stop following the preferences of your forefathers and other members of the church, you are sinning against God. Get rid of your measuring sticks! We only have ONE measuring stick, God's eternal and unchanging Word.

John 12:48 – Jesus speaking

*"He that rejecteth me, **and receiveth not MY words**, hath one that judgeth him: **the word that I have spoken**, the same shall judge him in the last day."*

Scenario #6: Dealing With Divisive Church Members

Titus 3:9–10

*"But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. **A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject;**"*

Paul writes, or should we say the Word of God declares plainly, that the church body is to, *"Avoid foolish questions... and strivings..."*

The Bible warns us to not get caught up in useless arguments. These are debates that do not help people grow in truth. They only lead to confusion and division.

In that day, people argued about things like family lines, traditions, and fine details of the law. Paul says these things are *"unprofitable and vain,"* meaning they do no good.

"A man that is an heretic..."

- This is someone who causes division by teaching things that go against the truth of Scripture.

"...after the first and second admonition..."

- Before taking action, the person should be warned. Not just once, but at least twice. This shows patience and gives them a chance to change.

"...reject"

- If the person refuses to listen and continues spreading error, then the church is to separate from them.

Scenario #7:

Deliver That Member Unto Satan

1 Timothy 1:19–20

"Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."

These men were not disciplined for breaking man-made rules. They were disciplined because they:

- Rejected truth
- Damaged their faith
- Spoke or taught wrongly about God (blasphemy)

The Bible explains it this way: *"which some having put away... have made shipwreck"*

Some members of the church turned away from truth. As a result, their faith was *"shipwrecked."*

They are clearly pointed out to the church: Hymenaeus and Alexander

These were men who had been part of the church but turned away from the truth.

"whom I have delivered unto Satan"

This does not mean Paul cursed them, sent them to hell, or gave up on them. It means something much more specific. What it means they were removed from the protection and fellowship of the church

"that they may learn not to blaspheme"

In the New Testament, the church is seen as a place of:

- Spiritual protection
- Teaching and truth
- Encouragement and accountability

Outside the church, they would feel the consequences of their choices. This is very similar to what we saw earlier in 1 Corinthians 5.

In conclusion:

Here is our takeaway concerning excommunication and shunning members of the church body:

- Church discipline is biblical
- It is used for serious, unrepentant sin against God and HIS commandments
- It involves removing someone from fellowship
- It is meant to correct, not destroy
- It is always aimed at bringing the person back

Before we close this study, I would like to ask a few final questions, especially for those who were raised under strict and legalistic church rules.

Is there a difference between man-made rules and God-given commands?

Do man-made rules carry the same weight if they are broken?

Is it ever biblical to excommunicate and shun someone for breaking a man-made rule?

As you think about these questions, remember this. One day, we will stand before God. On that day, it will not be our traditions that matter most, but what God said.

Galatians 1:10

"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

Acts 5:29

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men."

Matthew 10:28

*"And fear not **them** which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear **him** which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

What You Should Know to go to Heaven

First, you need to be saved:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Second, you cannot save yourself:

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

Third, Jesus has provided for your salvation:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Fourth, you must accept Jesus as your Savior:

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

Fifth, now is the time to accept Jesus as Savior:

"..behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

What to do:

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9)

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

Finally, will you bow your head and pray this prayer?

Dear God, I am a sinner, I know that my sin will send me to hell. I believe in my heart that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead in order that I might have eternal life. I now declare Him to be the Lord of my life. I renounce any effort on my part to save myself. The best that I know how, I receive Jesus as my Savior. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. Help me to live for you every day. Amen

Church Rules Vs. God's Rules

By John Weaver

Hebrews 13:17 says, *“Obey them that have the rule over you...”*

I have seen many Amish brothers and sisters that were concerned about this verse when they became born again. However, even in some of the most legalistic groups, God is still able to reach in and save people, and I am living proof of this truth.

Over forty years ago, I came face to face with God as a young Amish man. I was introduced to a God of love, who saved me. Because of this, I was willing to follow regardless of what it would cost or where it would take me.

Immediately after my decision to follow Christ, I was bombarded by well-meaning friends and family members, who insisted that the Bible would not allow us to seek other fellowship; they claimed that we must stay in the church we were in because they had the rule over us. They also claimed that we must obey our parents' wishes for all our lives regardless of what they wanted or demanded of us.

A few things became clear to me almost immediately, but some things took more time. I realized that after my conversion, I had more honor and respect for my father. Even though I could not, in good conscience, obey him anymore, I could still honor him.

And what about obeying the church and the rulers who did not know about the saving power of Jesus? These are the same leaders that call faith in Christ alone a fremda glauva (strange belief). The first concern of the Amish church leaders is that its followers obey man and that they don't read the Bible too much.

At first, it was hard for me to know what to do. Soon, however, I understood that it is more important to obey God above men. I should obey those that watch for my soul, and Godly, spiritual men would never choose to put their rules and agendas above the Word and will of God.

In addition, I also came to understand the principal of obeying the higher powers. Romans 13:1 says, *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”*

We are to always obey the higher powers. If a higher power disagrees with a lower power, we must always choose to obey the higher one; this order is true in the natural life as well as the spiritual life.

An illustration of this truth can be seen by looking at the story of Wisconsin vs. Yoder. In the early 1970s, a man by the name of Yoder refused to send his children to high school. As a result, he was taken to court by the state, and he lost the case. He continued going to higher courts including the highest court in the state of Wisconsin and all ruled against him. Finally, Yoder went to the Supreme Court of the United States on May 15, 1972, and they overruled the state laws and instead ruled in Yoder’s favor.

So, what happened to the lower courts’ decisions? They meant nothing anymore because their decision was overruled by a higher court. In the end, the higher courts decision became law.

God asks us to do the same in our spiritual lives. We can think of God’s Word as the “Supreme Court.” It is the highest power, and it overrules any other power. When this truth becomes real to a person who feels that they have to leave the culture or group they belong to in to follow Christ, it truly is liberating.

It helps to realize that God’s blessings and approval will follow us regardless of other pressures. Jesus said that he will send the Holy Spirit, and when that Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide us into all truth.

Amen!

John Weaver



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