

“Divesting of Hellions & Rebellions”

Acts 28:25-28

June 5, 2016

INTRO: Video – “ME church”

Is that the type of church YOU want?

Is that even a church?

What kind of Church did Jesus want?

*** John 17: Jesus prayed for koinonia! ***
(I asked you to go through that sermon)

What are YOU looking for in Christ/church?

BIG IDEA: Biblical Love pulls-in & pushes-away

ILLUSTRATION: “Childcare workers”

1. Love calls for caring for children...
2. Love ALSO pushes away care-givers:
 - a. Predators
 - b. Negligent
 - c. Wrong-minded

***** The same is true with Christ’s Church**

PREVIEW: (Our theme of eternal investing continues...)

A. **Welcome...** (v.23 “How-to invest”)

B. **Warn...** (v.24 “Divine Dynamics”)

C. **Walk-Away...**

a. Why *they* do... (v.25)

b. Why *you* do... (v.28)

T/S: FYI... Today is likely to challenge & calibrate many – both as “investments” & “investors.”

REVIEW:

I. v.23 = WELCOME: (Invite & Invest)

²³ When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

II. v.24 = WARNING: divine dynamics R O I

- a. **R.** – Receive who Responds
- b. **O.** – Obedient Overtime
- c. **I.** – Inform, Inspect, Inspire

²⁴ *And some were convinced by what he said, **BUT** others disbelieved.*

“What was the difference?”)

You NEED to understand the divine dynamics of eternal investing – both vertically & horizontally!

*You need to grasp **key doctrines**:
Word, God, Man, Sin, Justification, Election*

Ultimately, some will come & some will go
This is one of the major themes of Acts

T/S: **Investing** = Inform, INSPECT, Inspire

*So what happens
when the inspection fails?*

III. Today we examine the

“Walk-away”

We need to understand the who & why aspects within the “walk-away” world of church...

“Walk-aways” do so because they are:

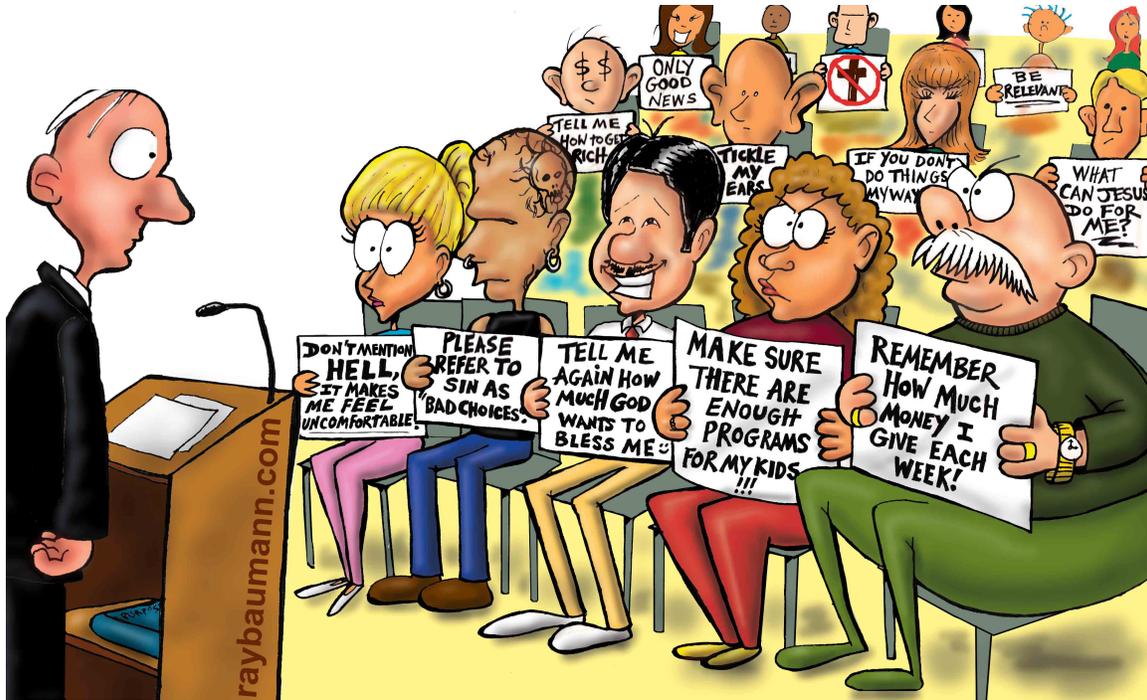
1. **Anti – Christ** (thus they are antichrists!)
2. **Anti - Commandments**
3. **Anti - Commission**

A. THEY Walk-away

²⁵ *And disagreeing among themselves, they departed*

Question: WHO? & WHY?

Answer: Who? = “ME-church” folks



These people are Anti – Christ because they are walking away from... **Word, Kingdom, Lord**

These folks DIVEST THEMSELVES from Christ, Church, & Christians!

Their response to “truth in love” is

1. “That’s it... Now you’ve gone too far!”
2. “Enough is enough... you’re over the top...”

3. ***"That's the Last Straw"***

People who complain about the straw that broke the camel's back usually do so because they want to "ride" the camel vs. feed & strengthen it...

One person's "final straw" is another person's eternal wake-up call. - JDP

Those who walk away are not "the Church" (1 Jn)
"My sheep will know My voice & follow Me." - Jesus

QUOTE: The gospel both unifies & divides...

***** See Luke 12:49-51 *****

**Jesus did not come to bring peace
but rather, Fire & DIVISION!**

⁴⁹ "I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already set ablaze! ⁵¹ Do you think that I came here to give peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!

- Jesus (Luke 12)

B. We WARN:

Warning = reinforce & apply truth in love

Jesus is either your foundational cornerstone
or your stumbling stone!

These people are Anti – Commandments because
they are CHOOSING to tell God “No.”

*...after Paul had made one statement:
“The Holy Spirit was right in saying to
your fathers through Isaiah the
prophet: ²⁶ ““Go to this people, and say,
“You will indeed hear but never
understand, and you will indeed see but
never perceive.” ²⁷ For this people’s
heart has grown dull, and with their
ears they can barely hear, and their eyes
they have closed; lest they should see
with their eyes and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart and
turn, and I would heal them.’*

***** This passage in Bible at least 7X**

***** This passage under-girds Romans 1**

See righteousness-confrontations in Scripture:

- Satan/serpent & Eve
- Cain kills Abel...
- Noah vs the rest of humanity
- Moses vs Pharaoh (& Korah plus...)
- Joshua & Caleb vs 10 spies plus...
- Elijah vs prophets of Baal
- Prophets vs. the people...
- Jesus vs the religious elite...
- Paul and just about EVERYbody!

T/S: Some people are getting mad at me right now...
Some will say: "This is exactly why I don't invest in Church! I don't need church....." (watch this)

VIDEO: *"Do I need to go to church?"*

They are in love with their disease. – Matthew Henry

*Nobody rejects salvation...
they reject **surrender!*** -JDP

"It's not a mistake... it's *a rebellion!*" -JDP

**"No" to Christ but "yes" to church...
calls for Church Discipline!**

C. We Walk-Away

These people walk away because, regardless of what their lips say, their lives reveal that they are *Anti – Commission*

Biblically... we are to

“DIVEST of Hellions & Rebellions!

²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

QUOTE: Let all that hear the gospel, and do not heed it, **tremble at this doom**; for, when once they are given up to hardness of heart, they are already in **the suburbs of hell**... - Matthew Henry

T/S: So... what's a Christian/Church to do?

COMMUNION

A Sure Guide to Heaven by (Puritan) Joseph Alleine

Unconverted man is like a choice instrument out of tune.

TRUTH:

Q: *There is a vast difference between being sanctified and civilized.*

Q: *It is one thing to have sin alarmed by convictions, and yet another to have it crucified by converting grace.*

READ: 2 Corinthians 13:5: *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you— unless, of course, you fail the test?*

Q: *Study your own hearts; do not rest till God has made thorough work with you; for you must be new, or else you are lost....*

Q: *Conversion affects the whole man... it is NOT the sowing on of a holiness patch. (2 Cor. 2:17)*

Q: *The sincere convert is not one man at church and another man elsewhere.*

TURNING-POINT:

Q: *All of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert. He loves not only the **wages but the work** of Christ, not only the **benefits but the burden** of Christ.*

By contrast.... The unsound convert **takes Christ in pieces...** He is all for the **salvation...** but is not for sanctification.

HEART CHECK:

Q: *Is holiness your pursuit? If not, you fall short of sound conversion.*

Q: *Here the hypocrite's rottenness is easily discovered. He desires holiness... only as a bridge to heaven, and asks earnestly what is the LEAST that will serve his needs...*

WARNING:

Q: *People may be, and often are, kept away from Christ by their inordinate love of lawful comforts, as much as by their most unlawful (and sin-stained) pursuits.*

Q: *Two sorts of peace are more to be dreaded than all the troubles in the world: Peace WITH & peace IN sin*

How long will you linger in Sodom?

T/S: Need to see Christ & Communion in Church

CLOSE:

When people are anti-Christ, anti-Commandments, & anti-Commission... they are inevitably anti-Church.

By definition,

these are hellions in rebellions...

Make no mistake... the Christian and the Church are to divest in such cases.

If you'll redefine or pervert God's Word in these 3 foundational truths, they will likely join you...

But then all you'll have is a crowd of hellions sharing rebellions!

I pray that you will divest yourself of obstinate hellions & rebellions.

Instead, I pray you will invest your life in Christ & His Church.

Again... read John 17 & walk with the King!

***The faithful Church
is the fruit of the cross. -JDP***

Let's Pray

“Divesting of Hellions & Rebellions”

Acts 28:25-28

June 5, 2016

Paul's greatest concern was his witness to the Jews in Rome. They had received no special word about Paul, but they did know that the "Christian sect" was being spoken against in many places ([Acts 28:21-22](#)). When you read Paul's letter to the Romans, you get the impression that the Jews in Rome had misunderstood some of his teachings ([Rom. 3:8](#); [14:1ff](#)). The apostle made it clear that his appeal to Caesar must not be interpreted as an indictment against his nation. Actually, he was a prisoner *on behalf of* his nation and "the hope of Israel."

On the day appointed, Paul spent "*from morning till evening*" explaining the Scriptures and revealing Christ in the Law and the Prophets. He had "dialogued" this way with the Jews in one synagogue after another, and now he was sharing the Word with the leaders of many synagogues in Rome.

The result?

Some were persuaded and some were not.

When the Jewish leaders left Paul's house, they were still arguing among themselves! But Paul had faithfully given his witness to the Jews in Rome, and now he would turn to the Gentiles.

Paul quoted the words of Isaiah to these men ([Isa. 6:9-10](#)), words that described their tragic spiritual condition.

Jesus had used this passage in connection with His parables of the kingdom ([Matt. 13:13-15](#); [Mark 4:12](#); [Luke 8:10](#)). **The Apostle John in his Gospel applied them to Israel** ([John 12:39-40](#)), and **Paul quoted them in his Roman epistle** ([Rom. 11:7-8](#)).

It is one thing to *listen* and quite something else to *hear*, and there is a great difference between *seeing* and *perceiving*.

QUOTE:

If anybody should have possessed spiritual understanding, it was these Jewish (religious) leaders, but their hearts were dull and hard. Too often those who enjoy the most spiritual privileges are not ready when they must make spiritual decisions.

But their unbelief did not put an end to Paul's ministry of the Gospel!

He announced that the Gospel some of the Jews had rejected would be proclaimed to the Gentiles, "*and they will hear it!*"

This is one of the major themes of Acts, how the Gospel moved from the Jews to the Gentiles and from Jerusalem to Rome. Without the Book of Acts, we would turn in the New Testament from the Gospel of John to Romans and ask, "How did the Gospel ever get from the Jews in Jerusalem to the Gentiles in Rome?"

- Bible Exposition Commentary

Verse 23. *Appointed him a day.* A day when they would hear him.

To his lodging. To the house where he resided, [Acts 28:30](#).

***He expounded.* He explained or declared the principles of the Christian religion.**

***And testified the kingdom of God.* Bore witness to, or declared the principles and doctrines of the reign of the Messiah.** [Matthew 3:2](#).

***Persuading them concerning Jesus.* Endeavouring to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah.**

Both out of the law of Moses. Endeavouring to convince them that he corresponded with the predictions respecting the Messiah in the books of Moses, [Genesis 49:10](#); [Deuteronomy 18:18](#), and with the types which Moses had instituted to prefigure the Messiah.

And out of the prophets. Showing that he corresponded with the predictions of the prophets. [Acts 17:3](#).

***From morning till evening.* An instance of Paul's indefatigable toil in endeavouring to win his own countrymen to Jesus as the Messiah.**

- (*) "lodging" [Philemon 1:2](#)
- (*) "expounded" [Luke 24:27](#), [Acts 17:3](#), [19:8](#)
- (*) "law and prophets" [Acts 26:6,22](#)
- (*) "testified" "bore testimony to"

Verse 24. *And some believed*, etc. [Acts 14:4](#).

(*) "some believed" [Acts 14:1](#), [17:4](#), [19:9](#), [Romans 3:3](#)

Verse 25. *Had spoken one word.* **One declaration of solemn prophecy, reminding them that it was the characteristic of the nation to reject the testimony of God, and that it was to be expected. It was the last solemn warning which we know Paul to have delivered to his countrymen the Jews.**

Well spake. Or he spoke the truth; **he justly described the character of the Jewish people.** The passage here quoted was as applicable in the time of Paul as of Isaiah.

***The Holy Ghost.* A full proof of the inspiration of Isaiah.** *By Esaias.* By Isaiah. [Isaiah 6:9,10](#).

(++) "Holy Ghost" "Holy Spirit" ([Psalms 81:11](#), [Isaiah 6:9](#), [Jeremiah 5:21](#), [Ezekiel 3:6,7](#), [12:2](#) [Matthew 13:14,15](#), [Romans 11:8](#))

Verse 26. *Saying*, etc. **See this passage explained;** [Matthew 13:14](#); [John 12:39,40](#).

Verse 27. (*) "waxed gross" "become"

Verse 28. ***The salvation of God. The knowledge of God's mode of saving men.***

Is sent unto the Gentiles. **Since you have rejected it, it will be offered to them.** [Acts 13:46](#).

QUOTE:

And that they will hear it.

Paul was not discouraged. If the gospel was rejected by one class of people, he was ready to offer it to another. If his own countrymen rejected and despised it, he never allowed himself to suppose that Christ had died in vain, but believed that others would be inclined to embrace its saving benefits. How happy would it be if all Christians had the same unwavering faith and zeal as Paul!

(* "Gentiles" [Matthew 21:41](#), [Acts 13:46,47](#), [18:6](#), [22:21](#), [26:17,18](#), [Romans 11:11](#))

Verse 29. *And had great reasoning.* Great discussion or debates. That is, the part which believed that Jesus was the Messiah, [Acts 28:24](#), discussed the subject warmly with those who did not believe. **This whole verse is wanting in the Syriac version and in some Greek Mss., and is supposed by Mill and Griesbach to be spurious.**

- **Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.**

vv. 25–28. From what follows, we have reason to suppose that the unbelieving party gave some unbecoming expression to their sentiments.

(25) “And disagreeing among themselves, they dispersed, Paul saying one word: Well did the Holy Spirit speak through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, (26) saying, Go to this people and say, With hearing you will hear and will not understand, and seeing, you will see and not perceive; (27) for the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them. (28) Be it known to you, therefore, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it.”

The purpose of henceforth turning to the Gentiles, implied in the last remark, indicates that far the larger portion of his hearers rejected the gospel.

The quotation from Isaiah furnishes the true explanation of the failure of the gospel to effect the salvation of all who hear it fully proclaimed. The theory that the human soul must be regenerated by an immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, or that the Spirit must impart a special force to the Word in individual cases, before the gospel can be received, is an attempt to explain this matter; but it is not consistent with the explanation here given by Paul.

Upon those theories, when a part of Paul's hearers went away unbelievers, the reason was that *they* had not enjoyed a divine influence which was granted to the *others*. On Paul's theory, however, the Lord had done as much for the one party as for the other; and the reason why one party were not believers was because, unlike the others, their ears were dull of hearing, and their eyes were closed. Neither was this condition superinduced without their own volition; for they are expressly charged with *closing their own eyes*. As they closed them *voluntarily*, they *could* have kept them open. Had they done so, it is implied that the process would have been reversed. They would have *seen* the truth; seeing it to be the truth, they would have given it a respectful *hearing*; hearing they would have *understood* it, and would have turned to the Lord that they might be healed. This was precisely the experience of the party who believed. They had themselves once been gross of heart and dull of hearing, and had closed their eyes against the truth as presented by previous preachers in Rome; but now they *opened* their eyes to what Paul presented, and the consequence was, they turned to the Lord.

We conclude, therefore, that the power of the gospel is sufficient for the conversion of all who will see and hear. In this arrangement there is no respect of persons with God, nor can any man attribute his final ruin to a withholding of saving influences on the part of the Holy Spirit.

- Commentary on Acts

28:24-29

II. What was the effect of this discourse. **One would have thought that so good a cause as that of Christianity, and managed by such a skilful hand as Paul's, could not but carry the day, and that all the hearers would have yielded to it presently; but it did not prove so:** the child

Jesus is set for the fall of some and the rising again of others, a foundation stone to some and a stone of stumbling to others.

QUOTE:

1. They did not agree among themselves, v. 25. Some of them thought Paul was in the right, others would not admit it. **This is that division which Christ came to send, that fire which he came to kindle, Luke 12:49, 51. Paul preached with a great deal of plainness and clearness, and yet his hearers could not agree about the sense and evidence of what he preached.**

2. Some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not, v. 24. There was the disagreement. **Such as this has always been the success of the gospel; to some it has been a savour of life unto life, to others a savour of death unto death. Some are wrought upon by the word, and others hardened; some receive the light, and others shut their eyes against it. So it was among Christ's hearers, and the**

spectators of his miracles, some believed and some blasphemed. If all had believed, there had been no disagreement; so that all the blame of the division lay upon those who would not believe.

III. The awakening word which Paul said to them at parting. He perceived by what they muttered that there were many among them, and perhaps the greater part, that were obstinate, and would not yield to the conviction of what he said; and they were getting up to be gone, they had had enough of it:

"Hold," says Paul, "take one word with you before you go, and consider of it when you come home: what do you think will be the effect of your obstinate infidelity? What will you do in the end hereof? What will it come to?"

QUOTE:

1. "You will by the righteous judgment of God be sealed up under unbelief. You harden your own hearts, and God will harden

them as he did Pharaoh's'; and this is what was prophesied of concerning you. Turn to that scripture (Isaiah 6:9, 10), and read it seriously, and tremble lest the case there described should prove to be your case."

QUOTE:

As there are in the Old Testament gospel promises, which will be accomplished in all that believe, so there are gospel threatenings of spiritual judgments, which will be fulfilled in those that believe not; and this is one.

*It is part of the commission given to
Isaiah the prophet; he is sent to make
those worse that would not
be made better.*

Well spoke the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers. What was spoken by JEHOVAH is here said to be spoken by the Holy Ghost, which proves that the Holy Ghost is God; and what was spoken to Isaiah is here said to be spoken by him to their fathers, for he was ordered to tell the people what God said to him; and, though what is there said had in it much of terror to the people and of grief to the prophet, yet it is here said to be well spoken.

*Hezekiah said concerning a message of
wrath, Good is the word of the Lord
which thou hast spoken, Isaiah 39:8.*

*And he that believes not shall
be damned is gospel, as well as,
He that believes shall be saved,
Mark 16:16.*

Or this may be explained by that of our Saviour ([Matthew 15:7](#)), "Well did Esaias prophesy of you. The Holy Ghost said to your fathers, that which would be fulfilled in you,

Hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand."

(1.) "That which was their great sin against God is yours; and that is this, you will not see. You shut your eyes against the most convincing evidence possible, and will not admit the conclusion, though you cannot deny the premises: Your eyes you have closed," [v. 27](#). This intimates an obstinate infidelity, and a willing slavery to prejudice. "As your fathers would not see God's hand lifted up against them in his judgments ([Isaiah 26:11](#)), so you will not see God's hand stretched out to you in gospel grace." It was true of these unbelieving Jews that they were prejudiced against the gospel; they did not see, because they were resolved they would not, and none so blind as those that will not see. They would not prosecute their convictions, and for this reason would not admit them. **They have purposely closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes the great things which belong to their everlasting peace, should see the glory of God, the amiableness of Christ, the deformity of sin, the beauty of holiness, the vanity of this world, and the reality of another.**

They will not be changed and governed by these truths, and therefore will not receive the evidence of them, lest they should hear with their ears that which they are loth to hear, the wrath of God revealed from heaven against them, and the will of God revealed from heaven to them. They stop their ears, like the deaf adder, that will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely. Thus their fathers did; they would not hear, [Zechariah 7:11, 12](#). And that which they are afraid of in shutting up their eyes and ears, and barricading (as it were) both their learning senses against him that made both the hearing ear and the seeing eye, is, lest they should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. **They kept their mind in the dark, or at least in a constant confusion and tumult, lest, if they should admit a considerate sober thought, they should understand with their heart how much it is both their duty and their interest to be religious, and so by degrees the truth should be too hard for them, and they should be converted from the evil ways which they take pleasure in, to those exercises to which they have now an aversion.**

Observe, God's method is to bring people first to see and he and so to understand with their hearts, and then to convert them, and bow their wills, and so heal them, which is the regular way of dealing with a

rational soul; and therefore **Satan prevents the conversion of souls to God by blinding the mind and darkening the understanding, [2 Corinthians](#)**

[4:4](#). And the case is very sad when the sinner joins with him herein, and puts out his own eyes. Ut liberius peccent, libenter ignorant-They plunge into ignorance, that they may sin the more freely. **They are in love with their disease, and are afraid lest God should heal them;** like Babylon of old, We would have healed her, and she would not be healed, [Jeremiah 51:9](#). This was the sin.

(2.) "That which was the great judgment of God upon them for this sin is his judgment upon you, and that is, you shall be blind. God will give you up to a judicial infatuation: Hearing you shall hear-you shall have the word of God preached to you over and over-but you shall not understand it; because you will not give your minds to understand it, God will not give you strength and grace to understand it. Seeing you shall see-you shall have abundance of miracles and signs done before your eyes-but you shall not perceive the convincing evidence of them. Take heed lest what Moses said to your fathers should be true of you ([Deu. 29:4](#)), The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day; and what Isaiah said to the men of his generation ([Isaiah 29:10-12](#)), The Lord has poured

out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes." What with their resisting the grace of God and rebelling against the light, and God's withdrawing and withholding his grace and light from them,-what with their not receiving the love of the truth, and God's giving them up for that to strong delusions, to believe a lie,-what with their wilful and what with their judicial hardness, the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing. They are stupid and senseless, and not wrought upon by all that can be said to them. No physic that can be given them operates upon them, nor will reach them, and therefore their disease must be adjudged incurable, and their case desperate. How should those be happy that will not be healed of a disease that makes them miserable? And how should those be healed that will not be converted to the use of the methods of cure? And **how should those be converted that will not be convinced either of their disease or of their remedy?** And how should those be convinced that shut their eyes and stop their ears? **Let all that hear the gospel, and do not heed it, tremble at this doom; for, when once they are thus given up to hardness of heart, they are already in the suburbs of hell; for who shall heal them, if God do not?**

2. "Your unbelief will justify God in sending the gospel to the Gentile world, which is the thing you look upon with such a jealous eye (v. 28): therefore seeing you put the grace of God

away from you, and will not submit to the power of divine truth and love, seeing you will not be converted and healed in the methods which divine wisdom has appointed, therefore be it known unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, that salvation which was of the Jews only ([John 4:22](#)), **the offer of it is made to them, the means of it afforded to them, and they stand fairer for it than you do; it is sent to them, and they will hear it, and receive it, and be happy in it.**" Now Paul designs hereby,

(1.) To abate their displeasure at the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, by showing them the absurdity of it. **They were angry that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles, and thought it was too great a favour done to them; but, if they thought that salvation of so small a value as not to be worthy of their acceptance,** surely they could not grudge it to the Gentiles as too good for them, nor envy them for it. The salvation of God was sent into the world, the Jews had the first offer of it, it was fairly proposed to them, it was earnestly pressed upon them, but they refused it; they would not accept the invitation which was given to them first to the wedding-feast and therefore must thank themselves if other guests be invited. **If they will not strike the bargain, nor come up to the terms, they ought not to be angry at those that will.** They cannot complain that the Gentiles took it over their heads, or out of their hands, for they had quite taken their hands off it, nay, they had lifted up the heel against it; and

therefore it is their fault, for it is through their fall that salvation is come to the Gentiles, [Romans 11:11](#).

(2.) To improve their displeasure at the favour done to the Gentiles to their advantage, and to bring good out of that evil; **for when he had spoken of this very thing in his epistle to the Romans, the benefit which the Gentiles had by the unbelief and rejection of the Jews, he says, he took notice of it on purpose that he might provoke his dear countrymen the Jews to a holy emulation, and might save some of them,** [Romans 11:14](#).

The Jews have rejected the gospel of Christ, and pushed it off to the Gentiles, but it is not yet too late to repent of their refusal, and to accept of the salvation which they did make light of; they may say No, and take it, as the elder brother in the parable, who, when he was bidden to go work in the vineyard, first said, I will not, and yet afterwards repented and went, [Matthew 21:29](#). Is the gospel sent to the Gentiles? Let us go after it rather than come short of it. And will they hear it, who are thought to be out of hearing, and have been so long like the idols they worshipped, that have ears and hear not? And shall not we hear it, whose privilege it is to have God so nigh to us in all that we call upon him for? Thus he would have them to argue, and to be shamed into the

belief of the gospel by the welcome it met with among the Gentiles. And, if it had not that effect upon them, it would aggravate their condemnation, as it did that of the scribes and Pharisees, who, when they saw the publicans and harlots submit to John's baptism, did not afterwards thereupon repent of their folly, that they might believe him, [Matthew 21:32](#).

IV. **The breaking up of the assembly**, as it should seem, in some disorder.

1. They turned their backs upon Paul. Those of them that believed not were extremely nettled at that last word which he said, that they should be judicially blinded, and that the light of the gospel should shine among those that sat in darkness. When Paul had said these words, he had said enough for them, and they departed, perhaps not so much enraged as some others of their nation had been upon the like occasion, but stupid and unconcerned, no more affected, either with those terrible words in the close of his discourse or all the comfortable words he had spoken before, than the seats they sat on. **They departed, many of them with a resolution never to hear Paul preach again, nor trouble themselves with further enquiries about this matter.**

2. They set their faces one against another; for they had great disputes among themselves. **There was not only a quarrel between those who believed and those who believed not, but even among those who believed not there were debates.** Those that agreed to

depart from Paul, yet agreed not in the reasons why they departed, but had great reasoning among themselves. **Many have great reasoning who yet do not reason right, can find fault with one another's opinions, and yet not yield to truth.**

Nor will men's reasoning among themselves convince them, without the grace of God to open their understandings.

- Matthew Henry's Commentary

A Sure Guide to Heaven

Originally entitled:

(An Alarm to the Unconverted)

by Joseph Alleine

Conversion does not consist in illumination or conviction or in a superficial change or partial reformation.

Q: *It is one thing to have sin alarmed by convictions, and another to have it crucified by converting grace. Many, because they have been troubled in conscience for their sins, think well of their case, miserably mistaking conviction for conversion.*

Q: *There is a vast difference between being sanctified and civilized.*

Q: *While conscience holds the whip over them, many will pray, hear, read, and give up their delightful sins; but no sooner is the lion asleep than they are at their sins again. Who was more religious than the Jews when God's hand was upon them? Yet no sooner was the affliction over, than they forgot God (again).*

Q: *A man may pass thru various transmutations, from ignorance to knowledge, from profanity to civility, then to a form of religion, and all this time he is still carnal and unregenerate, his nature remains unchanged.*

READ: 2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you— unless, of course, you fail the test?

Q: *Study your own hearts; do not rest till God has made thorough work with you; for you must be new men, or else you are lost men.*

Q: *Pray for the coming of the Spirit in the Word.*

Q: *Come from your knees to the sermon, and come from the sermon to your knees. The sermon does not prosper (you) because it is not watered by prayers & tears, nor covered by meditation.*

The subject of conversion is the elect sinner

Q: Effectual calling runs parallel with eternal election See: 2 Peter 1:10

READ: **Acts 3:19; Rom. 8:13; Acts 16:31**... *“Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.’ If you mortify the deeds of the body you shall live. “Believe and be saved.”*

Q: ***What can be plainer? Do not stand still disputing about your election, but set to repenting & believing. Cry to God for converting grace.***

Q: They who will not feed on the plain food of the Word will be choked with the bones...

Q: ***Conversion affects the whole man... it is NOT the sowing on of a holiness patch.*** (2 Cor. 2:17)

☐ Conversion creates a new MIND:

- - God’s glory now outweighs worldly interests
- - Turns men from darkness to light

☐ Conversion turns the bias of the will

- Converts take more joy in serving the Lord

Q: Converts take not holiness as the stomach takes bad tasting medicine, which a man will take rather than die, but as the hungry man does his beloved food

☐ Conversion changes the direction of affections

- *** ...from gold to grace
- *** ...his joy comes from faithful obedience
- *** ...his cares are now eternal vs. temporal
- *** ...now he fears sinning above suffering
- *** ... love is now love vs. lust & mere “like”
- *** ...his sorrows are truly God-honoring now
- *** ...he now hates sin vs. playing in it

Q: Caution... sudden & strong emotions of the affections are often found in hypocrites...

☐ Conversion of the BODILY MEMBERS

Q: These that before were the instruments of sin, are now become the holy utensils of Christ’s living temple.

☐ Conversion changes the LIFE & BEHAVIOR

Q: *The sin may still dwell in him (as a truly unwelcomed guest), yet it has no more dominion over him.*

- He now takes to heart both the smallest of sins and tiniest of duties.

Q: *The sincere convert is not one man at church and another man at home. He is not a saint on his knees and a cheat on his job.*

Q: *He does not pretend piety & neglect morality.*

Q: *Here again you find the unsoundness of many who take themselves for good Christians. They are partial in the law (Malachi 2:9), and take up the cheap and easy duties of religion, but they do not go thru with the work. They are like a cake half-baked and half raw.*

TURNING-POINT:

Q: *Here is the turning point. An unsound convert never takes up his rest in God; but converting grace does the work, and so cure the fatal misery of the fall, by turning the heart from its idol to the living God!*

A. We turn to Christ

Q: *All of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert. He loves not only the wages but the work of Christ, not only the benefits but the burden of Christ.*

By contrast... ***The unsound convert takes Christ in pieces... He is all for the salvation of Christ, but is not for sanctification.***

False converts... ***will not accept the salvation of Christ as He intends it... they want salvation from suffering, but they do NOT desire to be saved FROM sinning.***

B. We turn to the ways/commands of Christ

Q: *The heart that once rejected God's ways, and could not endure the*

strictness... now falls in love with them, and chooses them as its rule & guide forevermore.

- (1) Christian JUDGMENT becomes aligned with God
- (2) Christian DESIRES love what God loves...
- (3) Christian WILL is predominately for the ways of Christ

Q: ***The laws of Christ are the Christian's love*** (4) Christian DIRECTION is guided by obedience

Chapter Three:

Q: ***Here the hypocrite's rottenness is easily discovered. He desires holiness... only as a bridge to heaven, and asks earnestly what is the LEAST that will serve his needs... But the sound convert desires holiness for holiness' sake.***

HEART CHECK:

Q: ***Is holiness your pursuit? If not, you fall short of sound conversion.***

Q: Be informed, that straight is the gate and narrow the path that leads to life – and only FEW find it!

Unconverted man is like a choice instrument out of tune.

All hope for comfort here is in vain...

Q: ***The conscience cannot be truly pacified until***

soundly purified. (Hebrews 10:22)

2. 3. 4.

Q: ***The conversion herein described is not a high attainment of some advanced Christians, but every soul that is saved undergoes this change.***

WARNING:

Q: ***Two sorts of peace are more to be dreaded than all the troubles in the world: Peace WITH sin & Peace IN sin***

The MARKS of the UNCONVERTED

Q: Few will, in words, deny the necessity of the new birth; but they have a self-deluding confidence.... Consequently, like Nathan to David, we are forced to get close and personal... and tell him (the unconverted): "You are the man!"

Q: *Alas! For the unconverted, they must be undeceived, or they will be undone!*

God's Word clarifies, calls out, & describes those who cannot & will not see eternal life & the kingdom of God. Alleine identifies those biblical characters & characteristics... Initially referring to the overt, obvious lists as those who wear their disqualification "on

CLASSIC EXAMPLE:

See the church at Laodicea (READ: Revelation 3:17) Proverbs 30:12

their foreheads." He then moves to identify and describe those whose unconverted condition is hidden in their hearts. The author expounds Ephesians 5:5-6, Revelation 21:8, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 for starters....

Q: *There are then these several classes that, past all dispute, are unconverted; they carry their marks in their foreheads.*

- 1. The UNCLEAN: (a.k.a. "the goats")**
- 2. The COVETOUS (a.k.a. "idolaters")**
- 3. DRUNKARDS**
- 4. LIARS (the children of the father of lies... John 8:44)**
- 5. SWEARERS**
- 6. BACK-BITERS (a.k.a. gossips)**
- 7. THEIVES**
- 8. Those who NEGLECT the WORSHIP of GOD**
- 9. Those who KEEP BAD COMPANY**
- 10. SCOFFERS (a.k.a. skeptics, atheists, & the-like...)**

Q: I imagine many will begin to bless themselves, and think all is well, because they cannot be reproached with these grosser evils. But I must tell you that there is another sort of unsanctified persons, who carry their mark not in their foreheads but more secretly & covertly (in their hearts).

These frequently deceive themselves & others, and pass for good Christians... Many pass undiscovered until death and judgment bring everything to light. These self- deceivers seem to come even to heaven's gate with confidence... and yet are turned away at last (Matt. 7:21-23).

Q: *Multitudes perish by the hand of these 12 hidden sins*

1. GROSS WILLFUL IGNORANCE

Q: This sin kills in the dark while its victims think they have good hearts

Q: They see nothing & suspect not the hand that destroys them...

Q: You shall find, whatever excuses you make for ignorance, that it is a soul-ruining evil. (Isa. 27:11; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2 Cor. 4:3)

2. SECRET WITHHOLDINGS FROM CHRIST (a.k.a. unsurrendered)

3. EMPTY RITUALISTIC RELIGION

4. SINFUL MOTIVES

5. SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (a.k.a. "good person" / "good enough")

6. BEGRUDGING "OBEDIENCE" (a.k.a. spiritual manipulation)

7. CALCULATED "OBEDIENCE" (a.k.a. hell-haters vs. God-lovers)

8. WORLD-LOVERS (a.k.a. hypocrites of the heart)

Q: This is sure evidence of an unsanctified heart.

1 John 2:15 = "If any many loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Q: *Such a power of deceit is there in this sin that many times, when everybody else can see the man's worldliness & covetousness, he cannot see it himself, but has so many excuses (and rationale)... for his eagerness for the world that he blinds his own eyes & perishes in self-deceit.*

Q: *How many professing Christians are there with whom the world has more of their hearts & affections than Christ, 'who mind earthly things'?*

Q: *Yet ask these people, and they will tell you confidently that they prize Christ above all...*

Q: People may be, and often are, kept away from Christ as effectually by the inordinate love of lawful comforts, as by the most unlawful (and sin-stained) pursuits.

*** Read Hebrews 12:1-2 slowly & prayerfully...

9. UNFORGIVENESS

10. PRIDE

Q: When men love the praise of men more than the praise of God

11. FLESHLY PLEASURE-LOVERS

Q: A flesh-pleasing life cannot be pleasing to God.

Q: They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh and are careful to keep it under as their enemy. (See: Gal. 5:24; 1 Cor. 9:25-27)

12: PRESUMPTIOUS CONFIDENCE (a.k.a. "luke-warmness")

The MISERIES of the UNCONVERTED

Q: I find it sad by experience that such a spirit of sloth and slumber possesses the unsanctified that, though they are convinced that they are yet unconverted, often they carelessly sit still. Through the love of sensual pleasure, or the hurry of worldly business, or the noise and clamor of earthly cares and lusts and affections, the voice of conscience is drowned, and people go no farther than some cold wishes and general purposes of repenting and amending.

Q: It is therefore of high necessity that I not only convince them that they are unconverted, but that I also endeavor to bring them to a sense of the fearful misery of this state...

What tongue can tell the heirs of hell sufficiently of their misery... This cannot fully be done.

DIRECTIONS to the UNCOVERED

Q: Before you read these directions, I advise you, yea, I charge you before God & His holy angels, that you resolve to follow them; and call for His assistance...

Q: Hear then O sinner, to be converted & saved, take this counsel:

- 1. Accept the IMPOSSIBILITY of “UNCONVERTED SALVATION”**
- 2. Work & PRAY to SEE, SENSE, & FEEL YOUR SINS completely**

Q: Only those who see themselves as dead will come to Christ for life.

- 3. Ask God to BREAK YOUR HEART over your LOSTNESS**

Again... the church at Laodicea serves as a great “bad example” here...

- 4. Accept your TOTAL DEPRAVITY & inability to save yourself**
- 5. Henceforth, RENOUNCE/GIVE-UP ALL YOUR SINS**

Q: Your sins must die or you must die for them

Q: If you will part with your sins, God will give you His Christ!

- 6. Make CHRIST YOUR TREASURE & LAY DOWN your IDOLS**
- 7. Accept (w/ life v. lips) CHRIST as BOTH LORD and SAVIOR**
- 8. Present your LIFE a LIVING SACRIFICE to Him (Rom. 12:1-3)**
- 9. Accept & Embrace the complete AUTHORITY of God’s WORD**

- 10. Commit to CONSISTENT INTIMACY with God**
- 11. Live with BIBLICAL URGENCY** (for your own salvation & others)
- 12. Live in & Love IMMERSION in God’s WORD**
- 13. Seek, Sense, & Surrender** to the Holy Spirit’s work in you
- 14. PRAY FERVENTLY... WITHOUT CEASING**
- 15. Forsake EVIL COMPANY... & SINFUL ENVIRONMENTS**

Q: You will never be turned from sin till you decline and forego the temptations of sin.

Q: If you will be nibbling at the bait, and playing at the brink, and tampering with the snare, your soul will surely be taken.

- 16. PRAY & FAST regularly... ask God to break & fill your heart**

The MOTIVES to CONVERSION

JESUS!

1. **The God that made you most graciously invites you**
2. **The doors of heaven are thrown open to you**
3. **God will give you unspeakable privileges in this life**

CONCLUSION:

Q: And now, beloved, let me know your mind. What do you intend to do? will you go on and die, or will you turn & lay hold of eternal life?

How long will you linger in Sodom?

Do you not see how Satan cheats & deceives you by tempting you to delay?

If you are not now resolved, while the Lord is touching & inviting you, much less likely are you to be later...

What if God should, this night, require your soul?

NOTES:

Intro:

- Me Church
- Cartoon of church goes with signs...

Sermon Context:

1. v.23

2. v.24
3. v.25
4. v.26-28
5. v.30

Possible Outline of vv.26-28

- A. Savior
- B. Sin
- C. Sinners
- D. Salvation
- E. Sanctification

- Contrast with video: "Faces of the Church"

"Beautifully Unattractive" - JDP

- Again... "What do you want?"
- Next Q: "How do you think you get that?"
- Another Q: "What's your part to play?"
- Next Q: "Where are you getting your A's?"
- Last Q: "What if you're wrong?" (John 3:36)

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Wrong!

"That's the Last Straw / "Enough Is Enough!"

- People who complain about the straw that broke the camel's back are usually the people wanting to "ride" the camel vs. feed & strengthen it...
- One person's "final straw" is another person's eternal wake-up call. - JDP

*** See exactly what was being rejected (v.23 & v.24)

- Expounded the Gospel
- Testified to the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- Urgently persuaded those listening

*** Saying "No" to Christ but "yes" to church... is the EXACT reasoning & purpose for Matthew 18, "church discipline"

- Most don't see that...
- Most won't accept that
- Most are in need of it-
 - * See the 3 steps...
 - * Goal is always restoration
 - * Person's eternity may be at stake
 - * Church's witness & health are at stake!
- See Mohler's "Church Discipline" work in book reviews

That's it... Now you've gone too far!

My sheep will know My voice & follow Me.

You're over the top...

See *"The Jesus You Can't Ignore"*

See *"The Gospel According To Jesus"*

Note major Righteousness-confrontations in Scripture:

- Satan/serpent & Eve
- Cain kills Abel...

- Noah vs the rest of humanity
- Ishmael vs Isaac
- Moses vs Pharaoh (& Kora plus...)
- Joshua & Caleb vs 10 spies plus...
- David vs Goliath (and later King Saul)
- Elijah vs prophets of Baal
- Ezekiel
- Jeremiah
- Haggai
- Nehemiah vs enemies of Jerusalem
- Jesus vs the religious elite...
- John & Peter vs religious leaders...
- Paul & his companions (all over all the time)
- Paul in.....
 - * 3 Journeys
 - * Jerusalem, Ceaserea, & now Rome...
- Early Church fathers...
- Persecuted Church TODAY...

"It's not a mistake... it's a rebellion!" - JDP

Jesus is either your foundational cornerstone or your stumbling stone!

***** See Luke 12:49-51... Jesus did not come to bring peace but rather, DIVISION!**

*Nobody rejects salvation... they reject
surrender! - JDP*

***** See 2 Cor. 2:15-16...** The gospel always has & always will smell like life to some & death to others.
- How people respond to the scent of Christ tells you whether they smelled life or death...
- Some believe, others blaspheme...

Expound Isaiah 6:9-10... (per the Isaiah 6:8 premise)

1. Context

- A. OT meaning
- B. Other NT references/quotes
- C. Major theme in Acts

2. Text

- A. Sent to say
 - B. Hear but not understand
 - C. See but not perceive
 - D. Make hearts dull
 - E. Make ears heavy
 - F. Make eyes blind
 - G. Lest they:
 - See
 - Hear
 - Understand with their hearts
 - TURN (repent) & be HEALED
- *** See Romans 1

Concepts:

1. There's no such thing as "sorta pregnant"
2. Not all "kids of Abe" are kids of Abe
3. Take my ball & go home (spiritual brats)

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R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

“What is pure is corrupted much more quickly than what is corrupt is purified.”

—JOHN CASSIAN (A.D. 360-435)

The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.

The absence of church discipline is no longer remarkable—it is generally not even noticed. Regulative and restorative church discipline is, to many church members, no longer a meaningful category, or even a memory. The present generation of both ministers and church members is virtually without experience of biblical church discipline.

As a matter of fact, most Christians introduced to the biblical teaching concerning church discipline confront the issue of church discipline as an idea they have never before encountered. At first hearing, the issue seems as antiquarian and foreign as the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials. Their only acquaintance with the disciplinary ministry of the church is often a literary invention such as *The Scarlet Letter*.

And yet, without a recovery of functional church discipline—firmly established upon the principles revealed in the Bible—the

church will continue its slide into moral dissolution and relativism. Evangelicals have long recognized discipline as the “third mark” of the authentic

church.¹ Authentic biblical discipline is not an elective, but a necessary and integral mark of authentic Christianity.

How did this happen? How could the church so quickly and pervasively abandon one of its most essential functions and responsibilities? The answer is found in developments both internal and external to the church.

Put simply, the abandonment of church discipline is linked to American Christianity’s creeping accommodation to American culture. As the twentieth century began, this accommodation became increasingly evident as the church acquiesced to a culture of moral individualism.

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Though the nineteenth century was not a golden era for American evangelicals, the century did see the consolidation of evangelical theology and church patterns. Manuals of church discipline and congregational records indicate that discipline was regularly applied. Protestant congregations exercised discipline as a necessary and natural ministry to the members of the church, and as a means of protecting the doctrinal and moral integrity of the congregation.

As ardent congregationalists, the Baptists left a particularly instructive record of nineteenth-century discipline. Historian Gregory A. Wills aptly commented, “To an antebellum Baptist,

a church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church.”² Churches held regular “Days of Discipline” when the congregation would gather to heal breaches of fellowship, admonish wayward members, rebuke the obstinate, and, if necessary, excommunicate those who resisted discipline. In so doing, congregations understood themselves to be following a biblical pattern laid down by Christ and the apostles for the protection and correction of disciples.

No sphere of life was considered outside the congregation’s accountability. Members were to conduct their lives and witness in harmony with the Bible and with established moral principles. Depending on the denominational polity, discipline was codified in church covenants, books of discipline, congregational manuals, and confessions of faith. Discipline covered both doctrine and conduct. Members were disciplined for behavior that violated biblical principles or congregational covenants, but also for violations of doctrine and belief. Members were considered to be under the authority of the congregation and accountable to each other.

By the turn of the century, however, church discipline was already on the decline. In the wake of the Enlightenment, criticism of the Bible and of the doctrines of evangelical orthodoxy was widespread. Even the most conservative denominations began to show evidence of decreased attention to theological orthodoxy. At the same time, the larger culture moved toward the adoption of autonomous moral individualism. The result of these internal and external developments was the abandonment of church discipline as ever larger portions of the church member’s life were considered off-limits to the congregation.

This great shift in church life followed the tremendous cultural transformations of the early twentieth century—an era of “progressive” thought and moral liberalization. By the 1960s, only

a minority of churches even pretended to practice regulative church discipline. Significantly, confessional accountability and moral discipline were generally abandoned together.

The theological category of sin has been replaced, in many circles, with the psychological concept of therapy. As Philip Reiff has argued, the “Triumph of the Therapeutic” is now a

fixture of modern American culture.³ Church members may make poor choices, fail to live up to the expectations of an oppressive culture, or be inadequately self-actualized—but they no longer sin.

Individuals now claim an enormous zone of personal privacy and moral autonomy. The congregation—redefined as a mere voluntary association—has no right to intrude into this space. Many congregations have forfeited any responsibility to confront even the most public sins of their members. Consumed with pragmatic methods of church growth and congregational engineering, most churches leave moral matters to the domain of the

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individual conscience.

As Thomas Oden notes, the confession of sin is now passé and hopelessly outdated to many minds.

Naturalistic reductionism has invited us to reduce alleged individual sins to social influences for which individuals are not responsible. Narcissistic hedonism has demeaned any talk of sin or confession as ungratifying and dysfunctional. Autonomous individualism has divorced sin from a caring community. Absolute relativism has regarded moral values as so ambiguous that there is no measuring rod against which to assess anything as sin. Thus

modernity, which is characterized by the confluence of these four ideological streams, has presumed to do away with confession, and has in fact made

confession an embarrassment to the accommodating church of modernity.⁴

The very notion of shame has been discarded by a generation for which shame is an unnecessary and repressive hindrance to personal fulfillment. Even secular observers have noted the shamelessness of modern culture. As James Twitchell comments:

We have in the last generation tried to push shame aside. The human-potential and recovered-memory movements in psychology; the moral relativism of audience-driven Christianity; the penalty-free, all-ideas-are-equally-good transformation in higher education; the rise of no-fault behavior before the law; the often outrageous distortions in the telling of history so that certain groups can feel better about themselves; and the “I’m shame-free, but you should be ashamed of yourself” tone of political discourse are just some of the instances

wherein this can be seen.⁵

Twitchell sees the Christian church aiding and abetting this moral transformation and abandonment of shame—which is, after all, a natural product of sinful behavior. “Looking at the Christian Church today, you can only see a dim penitence of what was once painted in the boldest of colors. Christianity has simply lost it. It no longer articulates the ideal. Sex is

on the loose. Shame days are over. The Devil has absconded with sin.”⁶ As Twitchell laments, “Go and sin no more” has been replaced with “Judge not lest you be judged.”

Demonstration of this moral abandonment is seen in mainline Protestantism’s surrender to an ethic of sexual “liberation.” Liberal

Protestantism has lost any moral credibility in the sexual sphere. Homosexuality is not condemned, even though it is clearly condemned in the Bible. To the contrary, homosexuals get a special caucus at the denominational assembly and their own publications and special rights.

Evangelicals, though still claiming adherence to biblical standards of morality, have overwhelmingly capitulated to the divorce culture. Where are the evangelical congregations that hold married couples accountable for maintaining their marriage vows? To a great extent, evangelicals are just slightly behind liberal Protestantism in accommodating to the divorce culture and accepting what amounts to “serial monogamy”—faithfulness to one marital partner at a time. This, too, has been noted by secular observers. David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values remarked that “over the past three decades, many religious leaders have largely abandoned marriage as a vital area of religious attention, essentially handing the entire matter over to opinion leaders and divorce lawyers in the

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secular society. Some members of the clergy seem to have lost interest in defending and strengthening marriage. Others report that they worry about offending members of their

congregations who are divorced or unmarried.”⁷

Tied to this worry about offending church members is the rise of the “rights culture,” which understands society only in terms of individual rights rather than moral responsibility. Mary Ann Glendon of the Harvard Law School documents the substitution of “rights talk” for

moral discourse.⁸ Unable or unwilling to deal with moral categories, modern men and women resort to the only moral language they know and understand—the unembarrassed claim to “rights” that society has no authority to limit or deny. This “rights talk” is not limited to secular society, however. Church members are so committed to their own version of “rights talk” that some congregations accept almost any behavior, belief, or “lifestyle” as acceptable, or at least off-limits to congregational sanction.

The result of this is the loss of the biblical pattern for the church—and the impending collapse of authentic Christianity in this generation. As Carl Laney laments, “The church today is suffering from an infection which has been allowed to fester . . . As an infection weakens the body by destroying its defense mechanisms, so the church has been weakened by this ugly sore. The church has lost its power and effectiveness in serving as a vehicle for social, moral, and spiritual change. This illness is due, at least in part, to a neglect of church

discipline.”⁹ **HOLINESS AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Throughout the Bible, the people of God are characterized by a distinctive purity. This moral purity is not their own achievement, but the work of God within their midst. As the Lord said to the children of Israel, “I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves and be holy,

because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44a).¹⁰ Given that they have been chosen by a holy God as a people carrying His own name, God’s chosen people are to reflect His holiness by their way of living, worship, and beliefs.

The holiness code is central to the understanding of the Old Testament. As God’s chosen nation, Israel must live by God’s Word and law, which will set the children of Israel visibly apart

from their pagan neighbors. As the Lord said through Moses: “Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. Do what is right and good in the LORD’s sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers” (Deut. 6:17-18).

The nation is reminded that it is now known by God’s name and is to reflect His holiness. “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6). God promised His covenant faithfulness to His people but expected them to obey His Word and follow His law. Israel’s judicial system was largely designed to protect the purity of the nation.

In the New Testament, the church is likewise described as the people of God who are visible to the world by their purity of life and integrity of testimony. As Peter instructed the church: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful

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light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Peter continued, “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

As the new people of God, the church is to see itself as an alien community in the midst of spiritual darkness—strangers to the world who must abstain from the lusts and enticements of the world. The church is to be conspicuous in its purity and holiness and steadfast in its confession of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Rather than capitulating to the moral (or immoral) environment, Christians are to be conspicuous by their good behavior. As Peter summarized, “Just as he who ‘called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” (1 Pet. 1:15).

The apostle Paul clearly linked the holiness expected of believers to the completed work of Christ in redemption: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Col. 1:21-22). Clearly, this holiness made complete in the believer is the work of God; holiness is the evidence of His redemptive work. To the Corinthian congregation Paul urged, “Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor 7:1).

The identity of the church as the people of God is to be evident in its pure confession of Christ, its bold testimony to the Gospel, and its moral holiness before the watching world. Nothing less will mark the church as the true vessel of the Gospel.

DISCIPLINE IN THE BODY

The first dimension of discipline in the church is that discipline exercised directly by God as He deals with believers. As the book of Hebrews warns, “You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he

punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?” (Heb. 12:5-7). As the passage continues, the author warns that those who are without discipline “are illegitimate children and not true sons” (v. 8). The purpose of discipline, however, is righteousness. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (v. 11).

This discipline is often evident in suffering—both individual and congregational. Persecution by the world has a purifying effect on the church. This persecution is not to be sought, but if the church is “tested by fire,” it must prove itself pure and genuine and receive this suffering as the Lord’s discipline, even as children receive the discipline of a father. The fact that this analogy is so foreign to many modern Christians points out the fact that discipline has disappeared in many families, as well as in the church. Children are treated as moral sovereigns in many households, and the social breakdown of the family has diminished its moral credibility. The loving discipline portrayed in this passage is as foreign to many

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families as it is to most congregations.

God’s loving discipline of His people is His sovereign right and is completely in keeping with His moral character—His own holiness. His fatherly discipline also establishes the authority and pattern for discipline in the church. Correction is for the greater purpose of restoration and the even higher purpose of reflecting the holiness of God.

The second dimension of discipline in the church is that

disciplinary responsibility addressed to the church itself. Like God's fatherly discipline of those He loves, the church is to exercise discipline as an integral part of its moral and theological responsibility. That the church can fall into moral disrepute is evident in the New Testament itself.

The apostle Paul confronted a case of gross moral failure in the Corinthian congregation that included "immorality of . . . a kind that does not occur even among pagans" (1 Cor. 5:1). In this case, apparent incest was known to the congregation, and yet it had taken no action.

"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?" Paul accused the Corinthian congregation (v. 2). He instructed them to act quickly and boldly to remove this stain from their fellowship. He also warned them, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are" (vv. 6-7a).

Paul was outraged that the Corinthian Christians would tolerate this horrible sin. Incest, though not literally unknown in the pagan world, was universally condemned and not tolerated. In this respect the Corinthian church had fallen beneath the moral standards of the pagan world to whom they were to witness. Paul was also exasperated with a congregation he had already warned. Mentioning an earlier letter unavailable to us, Paul scolds the Corinthians:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 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. 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. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.” — VV. 9-13

The moral outrage of a wounded apostle is evident in these pointed verses, which call the Corinthian church to action and the exercise of discipline. They have now fallen into corporate sin by tolerating the presence of such a bold and arrogant sinner in their midst. Their moral testimony is clouded, and their fellowship is impure. Their arrogance has blinded them to the offense they have committed before the Lord. The open sin in their midst is like a cancer that, left unchecked, will spread throughout the entire body.

In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul offers similar instruction, combining concern for moral purity and doctrinal orthodoxy: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6). Paul instructs the Thessalonians to follow his

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own example because “We were not idle when we were with you” (2 Thess. 3:7).

THE PATTERN OF PROPER DISCIPLINE

How should the Corinthians have responded to this public sin? Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians of delivering this sinner unto Satan and removing him from fellowship. How is this to be done? To the Galatians Paul wrote that “if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). This teaching is clear, indicating

that spiritual leaders of the church are to confront a sinning member with a spirit of humility and gentleness, and with the goal of restoration. But what are the precise steps to be taken?

The Lord Himself provided these instructions as He taught His disciples: “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. 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.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15-17).

The Lord instructed His disciples that they should first confront a sinning brother in private. “Show him his fault,” instructed the Lord. If the brother acknowledges the sin and repents, the brother has been won. The fact that the first step is a private confrontation is very important. This limits the injury caused by the sin and avoids a public spectacle, which would tarnish the witness of the church to the Gospel.

In the event the private confrontation does not lead to repentance, restoration, and reconciliation, the next step is to take witnesses. Jesus cited the Deuteronomic law which required multiple witnesses of a crime for conviction. Yet His purpose here seems larger than the mere establishment of the facts of the case. Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother. The brother cannot claim that he was not confronted with his sin in a brotherly context.

If the brother does not listen even in the presence of one or two witnesses, this becomes a matter for the congregation. “Tell it to the church,” instructed Jesus, and the church is to judge the matter

before the Lord and render a judgment that is binding upon the sinner. This step is extremely serious, and the congregation now bears a corporate responsibility. The church must render its judgment based upon the principles of God's Word and the facts of the case. Again, the goal is the restoration of a sinning brother or sister—not a public spectacle.

Sadly, this congregational confrontation may not avail. If it does not, the only recourse is separation from the sinning brother. "Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." instructed the Lord, indicating that the separation is to be real and public. The congregation is not to consider the former brother as a part of the church. This drastic and extreme act is to follow when a brother or sister will not submit to the discipline of the church. We should note that the church should still bear witness to this man, but not as brother to brother, until and unless repentance and restoration are evident.

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THE POWER OF THE KEYS

What is the church's authority in church discipline? Jesus addressed this issue directly, even as He declared the establishment of the church after Peter's great confession: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). This "power of the keys" is one of the critical controversies between evangelicals and the Church of Rome. Roman Catholics believe that the pope, as Peter's successor, holds the keys, and thus the power of binding and loosing. Protestants, however, believe that the Lord granted the keys to the church. This interpretation is supported by the Lord's

repetition of the matter in Matthew 18:18, “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.” Here the context reveals that the

power of binding and loosing is held by the church.¹¹

The terms binding and loosing were familiar terms used by rabbis in the first century to refer to the power of judging matters on the basis of the Bible. The Jewish authorities would determine how (or whether) the Scriptures applied in a specific situation and would render judgment by either binding, which meant to restrict, or loosing, which meant to liberate. The church still bears this responsibility and wields this power. John Calvin, the great Genevan Reformer, believed that the power of binding should be understood as excommunication, and loosing as reception into membership: “But the church binds him whom it excommunicates—not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him when it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity

which is in Christ Jesus.”¹²

Calvin’s interpretation is fully in agreement at this point with Martin Luther, whose essay on “The Keys” (1530) is a massive refutation of papal claims and Roman Catholic tradition. Luther saw the keys as one of Christ’s great gifts to the church. “Both of these keys are

extremely necessary in Christendom, so that we can never thank God enough for them.”¹³ As a pastor and theologian, Luther saw the great need for the church to bear the keys, and he understood this ministry to be gracious in the recovery of sinning saints. As Luther reflected:

For the dear Man, the faithful Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ, is well aware that His beloved Christians are frail, that the devil, the flesh, and the world would tempt them unceasingly and in many ways, and that at times they would fall into sin. Therefore, He has given us this remedy, the key which binds, so that we might not remain too confident in our sins, arrogant, barbarous, and

without God, and the key which looses, that we should not despair in our sins.¹⁴

What about a church leader who sins? Paul instructed Timothy that a church leader—an elder—is to be considered “worthy of double honor” when he rules well (1 Tim. 5:17). When an elder sins, however, that is a matter of great consequence. First, no accusation is to be received on the basis of only one uncorroborated witness. If a charge is substantiated by two or three witnesses, however, he is “to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Tim. 5:20). Clearly, leadership carries a higher burden, and the sins of an elder cause an even greater injury to the church. The public rebuke is necessary, for the elder sins against the entire congregation. As James warned, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more

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strictly” (Jas. 3:1).

The scandals of moral failure on the part of church leaders have caused tremendous injury to the cause of Christ. The stricter judgment should be a vivid warning to those who would violate the Word of God and lead others into sin by example. The failure of the contemporary church to apply consistent biblical church

discipline has left most of these scandals unresolved on biblical grounds—and thus a continuing stain on the church.

The Bible reveals three main areas of danger requiring discipline. These are fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. Each is of critical and vital importance to the health and integrity of the church.

FIDELITY OF DOCTRINE

The theological confusion and compromise that mark the modern church are directly traceable to the church's failure to separate itself from doctrinal error and heretics who teach it. On this matter the Bible is clear: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (2 John 9-11). The apostle Paul instructed the Galatians that "if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:8-9).

The letters of 2 Peter and Jude explicitly warn of the dangers presented to the church in the form of false prophets and heretics. Jude alerts the church that "certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (v. 4). Similarly, Peter warns, "There will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them— bringing swift destruction on themselves" (2 Pet. 2:1).

The church must separate itself from these heresies — and from the heretics! The permissive posture of the church in this century has allowed the most heinous heresies to grow unchecked — and heretics to be celebrated. Francis Schaeffer was among the most eloquent modern prophets who decried this doctrinal cowardice. Schaeffer emphatically denied that a church could be a true Christian fellowship and allow false doctrine. As he stated, “One cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the dunamis, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world can see. By the grace of God, therefore, the church must be known simultaneously for its purity of doctrine

and the reality of its community.”¹⁵ **PURITY OF LIFE**

The visible community of the true church is also to be evident in its moral purity. Christians are to live in obedience to the Word of God and to be exemplary in their conduct and untarnished in their testimony. A lack of attention to moral purity is a sure sign of

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congregational rebellion before the Lord.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul chastised them severely: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

When Christians sin, their sin is to be confronted by the church in accordance with the pattern revealed in Scripture. The goal is the restoration of a sister or a brother, not the creation of a public spectacle. The greatest moral danger to the church is the toleration of sin, public or private. Conversely, one of the greatest blessings to the church is the gift of biblical church discipline—the ministry of the keys.

UNITY OF FELLOWSHIP

The integrity of the church is also dependent upon the true unity of its fellowship. Indeed, one of the most repeated warnings found in the New Testament is the admonition against toleration of schismatics. The unity of the church is one of its most visible distinctives—and most precious gifts.

The warnings about this are severe: “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Rom. 16:17- 18). Writing to Titus, Paul instructed that the church should “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11).

A breach in the unity of the church is a scandal in the body of Christ. The church is consistently exhorted to practice and preserve a true unity in true doctrine and biblical piety. This unity is not the false unity of a lowest-common-denominator Christianity, the “Gospel Lite” preached and taught in so many modern churches, but rather is found in the healthy and growing maturity of the

congregation as it increases in grace and in its knowledge of the Word of God

The ongoing function of church discipline is to be a part of individual self-examination and congregational reflection. The importance of maintaining integrity in personal relationships was made clear by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount as He instructed the disciples that anger against a brother is a deadly sin. Reconciliation is a mandate, not a hypothetical goal. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24).

Similarly, Paul warned against participating in the Lord’s Supper amidst divisions. The Supper itself is a memorial of the broken body and shed blood of the Savior and must not be desecrated by the presence of divisions or controversies within the congregation, or by unconfessed sin on the part of individual believers. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the

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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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Cor. 11:26-29).

The “discipline of the Table” is thus one of the most important disciplinary functions of the congregation. The Lord’s Supper is not to be served indiscriminately, but only to those baptized

believers who are under the discipline of the church and in good standing with their congregation.

THE RECOVERY OF THE THIRD MARK

The mandate of the church is to maintain true gospel doctrine and order. A church lacking these essential qualities is, biblically defined, not a true church. That is a hard thing to say, for it clearly indicts thousands of American congregations who long ago abandoned this essential mark and have accommodated themselves to the spirit of the age. Fearing lawsuits and lacking courage, these churches allow sin to go unchallenged, and heresy to grow unchecked. Inevitably, the false unity they seek to preserve gives way to the factions that inevitably follow the gradual abandonment of biblical Christianity. They do not taste the true unity of a church grounded on the truth and exercising the ministry of the keys.

John Leadley Dagg, the author of a well-known and influential church manual of the nineteenth century, noted: “It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ

goes with it.”¹⁶ If so, and I fear it is so, Christ has abandoned many churches who are blissfully unaware of His departure.

At the end of the twentieth century, the great task of the church is to prove itself to be the genuine church revealed in the New Testament— proving its authenticity by a demonstration of pure faith and authentic community. We must regain the New Testament concern for fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. We must recover the missing mark.

NOTES

1. The identification of proper discipline as the third mark of the true church goes back at least to the Belgic Confession [1561]: “The marks by which the true Church is known are

these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.” “The Belgic Confession,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff, Vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), pp. 419-420. Similarly, the Abstract of Principles of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1858) identifies the three essential marks as true order, discipline, and worship.

2. Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), P. 12.

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3. Philip Reiff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).
4. Thomas C. Oden, *Corrective Love: The Power of Communion Discipline* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), p. 56.
5. James B. Twitchell, *For Shame: The Loss of Common Decency in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), P. 35.

6. Ibid., p. 149.
7. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 231.
8. Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1991).
9. J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), p. 12.
10. This verse is quoted in I Peter 1:16 and is addressed to the church.
11. The New American Standard Bible, revised edition, is correct in translating the Greek verb in the perfect tense. Any other translation of the verb tense confuses the meaning and can lead to a distorted understanding of Jesus' teaching. He is not stating that the church has the power to determine what shall later be decided in heaven. The verb tense indicates that as the church functions on the authority of Scripture, what it determines shall have been already determined in heaven. For a complete consideration of this issue, see Julius Robert Mantey, "Distorted Translations in John 20:23; Matthew 16:18-19 and 18:18," *Review and Expositor* 78 (1981), pp. 409-416.
12. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 1214.
13. Martin Luther, "The Keys," in *Luther's Works* (American Edition), ed. Conrad Bergendoff, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p.

373.

14. Ibid.

15. Francis A. Schaeffer, "The Church Before the Watching World," in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1970), p. 144.

16. J. L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston, SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), p. 274. **Author**

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Present Evangelical Crisis©, John H. Armstrong, General Editor. [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998].

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