

# By What Biblical Authority Does One Church Withdraw Fellowship from a Sister Congregation?

Intro: God's Word teaches that we are to withdraw our fellowship from certain individuals, yet few actually practice it. The Bible teaches we are to withdraw from these general categories: the immoral (1 Cor. 5), those who walk disorderly (2 The. 3:6 "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 do not abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9 "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."), those who are factious or causing divisions (Tit. 3:10 "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;"), those who teach damnable doctrines (Rom. 16:17 "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."), and those who refuse to repent of personal offenses (Mat. 18:15-20). These individuals have forfeited their fellowship with God, thus we cannot remain in fellowship with them and continue to be in fellowship with God ourselves.

We have Bible authority for withdrawing from individuals, do we have authority from God's Word to withdraw from another congregation?

## I. BIBLE AUTHORITY

- A. The Bible (or any language) authorizes in one of three ways.
  1. Direct statements
  2. Examples
  3. Implications.
  4. God only needs to use one of the three to authorize the action.
- B. Direct statements.
  1. There are eleven different kinds of direct statements found in the Greek New Testament.
  2. They direct man or authorize man to act in a certain way.
- C. Examples.
  1. The activities recorded are accounts of action, some of which are examples or patterns which must be done today or may be followed today.
  2. David Brown wrote, "An account of an action constitutes an example (pattern) that we **must** follow when we find the church with general apostolic approval and teaching (authority) practicing whatever it may be that is right within itself and essential to Christianity."
- D. Implication.
  1. An implication is when an action, fact, or teaching is absolutely demanded by the information given in the Bible without being specifically stated.
  2. Roy Deaver's illustration is appropriate: "It is 'given' to us that we are dealing with a geometric figure, which figure is a square, and one side of which is 6 inches. Let us identify each of these facts as distinct propositions. (A) We are dealing with a geometric figure. (B) This figure is a square. (C) One side of the figure is 6 inches. Since we distinctly **know** these three things, what else do we know **because we know these three things**? Or, to ask the same things differently, 'What are the implications of these three things?' What things are **implied** by the **conjunction** made up of the **conjuncts** here identified as (A) and (B) and (C)? We know (D) that there are three other sides each of which is six inches. We know (E) that the perimeter of this figure is twenty-four inches.

We know (F) that the area of this figure is thirty-six square inches. And, we know (G) that there are four right angles in this figure. The **conjunction** made up of **conjuncts** A and B and C **implies** (D) and (E) and (F) and (G)”

- E. Withdrawing fellowship
1. The Bible explicitly states that a congregation is to withdraw fellowship from those classes of individuals previously mentioned.
  2. It does not **explicitly** state for a congregation to withdraw fellowship from another congregation.
  3. Does the Bible implicitly teach that one congregation may withdraw its fellowship from another congregation?

## II. SOME FELLOWSHIP CONCEPTS

- A. Obedience to the Gospel.
1. We come into a relationship (fellowship) with God; Mat. 28:19 “<sup>19</sup>Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”
  2. Being in fellowship with God we are also in fellowship with all others who are in fellowship with Him; 1 John 1:3 “<sup>3</sup>That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”
  3. He also becomes a member of the Lord’s church.
    - a. The 3000 who obeyed the Gospel on the day of Pentecost were added to the church.
      - (1) Acts 2:41, 47 “<sup>41</sup>Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls...<sup>47</sup>Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
      - (2) They are described as having fellowship; Acts 2:42 “<sup>42</sup>And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
      - (3) They made up the church at Jerusalem.
    - b. As people obeyed the Gospel in other areas, they also were added to the church universal; Mat. 16:18 “<sup>18</sup>And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
    - c. They also make up the local church in that specific area.
  4. We have the church spoken of on a congregational basis.
    - a. The church at Corinth; 1 Cor. 1:2 “<sup>2</sup>Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:”
    - b. The church at Thessalonica; 1 The. 1:1 “<sup>1</sup>Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
    - c. Seven churches in Asia; Rev. 1:4 “<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;”
- B. Congregations will have fellowship with other congregations.
1. This is true even though separated by great distances.
  2. Is there authority for one congregation to fellowship another?
- C. Jerusalem and Antioch.
1. Jerusalem sent Barnabas to exhort the church at Antioch; Acts 11:22-24 “<sup>22</sup>Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. <sup>23</sup>Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and

exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. <sup>24</sup>For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.”

2. Antioch expressed fellowship for Jerusalem by sending them financial support during a famine; Acts 11:27-30 <sup>27</sup>And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. <sup>28</sup>And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. <sup>29</sup>Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: <sup>30</sup>Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

D. Paul’s experience at Corinth.

1. Various congregations had fellowship with the Corinthian church by supplying financial support for him; 2 Cor. 11:8 <sup>8</sup>“I robbed other churches, taking wages *of them*, to do you service.”
2. Phi. 4:14-16 <sup>14</sup>“Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. <sup>15</sup>Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. <sup>16</sup>For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.”
3. We learn:
  - a. Several congregations sent money to Philippi for Paul’s support.
  - b. Those congregations were fellowshiping Philippi by sending money to them for Paul’s support.
  - c. The Philippi church fellowshiped the Corinthian and Thessalonian churches by helping them by supporting Paul.

### III. WITHDRAWAL CONCEPTS

- A. If fellowship can be extended, it can be withdrawn.
  1. We established that a congregation may extend fellowship.
  2. If fellowship can be extended (based upon common acts and common loyalty to God’s Word) then they have the right to cease that fellowship with that sister congregation if the situation changes.
- B. Consider this scenario:
  1. Two congregations in the same general location we will call “A” and “X.”
    - a. Both are faithful to the Lord.
    - b. They have fellowship with each other in differing works of which everyone knows.
  2. Congregation “X” slowly begins to change.
    - a. They bring in a new preacher who does not respect the authority of the Bible.
    - b. They start to bring in innovations not authorized by the Bible.
    - c. They bring in the instrument of music into the worship.
    - d. Other innovations are added to the point that there is no similarity between the church you read about in the Bible and them.
    - e. However, they keep the sign: “Church of Christ” on the building.
  3. Congregation “A” sees the changes and discusses it among themselves.
    - a. They do not agree with the changes taking place.
    - b. Someone convinces them that they cannot do anything about it because of congregational autonomy.
    - c. Some would say that they could never withdraw the fellowship they once enjoyed with “X.”

4. Everyone knows about the former fellowship, and they believe it still exists.
  - a. It does according to this view.
  - b. They believe that “A” now believes the same as “X.”
  - c. The cause of Truth and righteousness has suffered.
  - d. Error and false doctrine has run rampant resulting in Satan gaining the advantage.
- C. Latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:
  1. These types of situations took place all over the nation.
  2. Congregations began worshiping in an unauthorized manner by bringing in mechanical instruments of music and perverting the organization and work of the church by adding the missionary society.
  3. If congregations cannot withdraw from another:
    - a. We need to go back and apologize to the Independent Christian denomination and the Disciples of Christ denomination.
    - b. We also need to restore fellowship with them.
- D. After the first century:
  1. The church went into general apostasy.
  2. During that apostasy should those remaining faithful continue to fellowship those that apostatized?
  3. Since that apostasy ended in the Roman Catholic Church, should we go back and extend fellowship to them?
- E. Questions:
  1. Is withdrawal limited to just individuals?
  2. Is this action limited only to a congregation’s action toward its own members?
  3. Can these passages apply to an individual who is not a part of this particular congregation?
    - a. If a member of another congregation was causing division in a congregation of which they were not a member, could those Bible passages be applied to that individual?
    - b. If they could not be applied to that one causing division, why not?
  4. Congregation “T.”
    - a. If several members become involved in sin, they are to withdraw from each of those members.
    - b. If those members decided to begin congregation “P,” would “T” still have the right to withdraw fellowship from them?
    - c. Would “T” have the right to withdraw from “P”?
    - d. Some would say that “T” would not have the right to withdraw from those individuals if they for congregation “P.”

#### IV. BIBLE VERSES

- A. Amos 3:3 “<sup>3</sup>Can two walk together, except they be agreed? [KJV]”; “<sup>3</sup>Shall two walk together, except they have agreed? [ASV]”
  1. **“Agreed” defined:**
    - a. **“to come together at an appointed time or place” (Gesenius 355).**
    - b. **“appoint, assign,... reflexive, *meet at an appointed place,...meet by appointment* Am 3:3” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs xiii).**

- c. “The Niphal form is used for God’s meeting Israel at the sanctuary (Ex 25:22; 29:43f.; 30:6, 36) and for the assembling of the congregation for worship in the sense of appearing (Num 10:3; I Kgs 8:5; II Chr 5:6) or for other purposes.... It may also designate making an appointment (Amos 3:3; Job 2:11; Ps 48:4)” (Harris, Archer, and Waltke 388).
2. The appointment:
  - a. It is between God and the prophet.
  - b. ““Do two men walk together, without having agreed as to their meeting?” (*nō’ad*, to betake one’s self to a place, to meet together at an appointed place or an appointed time; compare Job 2:11, Josh. 11:5, Neh. 6:2; not merely to agree together), contains something more than the trivial truth, that two persons do not take a walk together without a previous arrangement. The two who walk together are Jehovah and the prophet (Cyril); not Jehovah and the nation, to which the judgment is predicted (Cocceius, Marck, and others). Amos went as prophet to Samaria or Bethel, because the Lord had sent him thither to preach judgment to the sinful kingdom” (Keil and Delitzsch 175).
  - c. “Can God’s prophets be so unanimous in prophesying against you, if God’s Spirit were not joined with them, or if their prophecies were false? The Israelites were ‘at ease,’ not believing that God was with the prophets in their denunciations of coming ruin to the nation (Am 6:1, 3; compare 1Ki 22:18, 24, 27; Je 43:2). This accords with Am 3:7, 8. So ‘I will be with thy mouth’ (Ex 4:12; Je 1:8; Mt 10:20). If the prophets and God were not agreed, the former could not predict the future as they do. In Am 2:12 He had said, the Israelites forbade the prophets prophesying; therefore, in Am 3:3, 8, He asserts the agreement between the prophets and God who spake by them against Israel” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown).
3. The agreement
  - a. Amos was doing exactly what God commanded him to do: they agreed.
  - b. The people were not doing what God commanded; they transgressed His Will.
    - (1) They did not agree.
    - (2) Thus, God was going to destroy them.
4. Fellowship
  - a. God had fellowship with Amos because he was following God’s Word.
  - b. God could not have fellowship with the people because they were no longer agreed with Him.
  - c. The prophet could not have fellowship with the people and remain in fellowship with God.
    - (1) If the prophet fellowshiped them, he would be in agreement with the people and not God.
    - (2) The people were walking one way while he was in agreement with God.
    - (3) Thus there was no fellowship between them.
5. This is a principle that applies to any situation.
  - a. When we have *agreement* with God, God will be with us—we will walk together.

- b. If one is not *agreed* with God, then God will not walk with him.
  - c. Congregations
    - (1) If there is a congregation who are no longer agreed with God, God does not fellowship them.
    - (2) If a congregation is agreed with God, God does fellowship them.
    - (3) Just as Amos could not have fellowship with those who were not agreed with God; a congregation who is in agreement with God cannot fellowship one who is not.
- B. Acts 9:26** <sup>26</sup>“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”
- 1. The situation:
    - a. When Saul comes to Jerusalem, he tries to “join himself” or as we would call it “place membership” with the saints there.
    - b. Brethren at Jerusalem initially refused to accept Saul into fellowship.
    - c. Barnabas vouched for Saul, so they accepted him.
    - d. Neither Barnabas nor Saul condemned them for their refusal.
  - 2. We learn:
    - a. A congregation has the right to question one who seeks to place membership with that congregation.
    - b. Saul had been a member of the congregation at Damascus.
      - (1) One congregation can refuse to extend fellowship to a member of a sister congregation.
      - (2) If it can refuse to extend fellowship to one individual in a sister congregation, then it can the whole congregations.
- C. Rom. 16:17-18** <sup>17</sup>“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. <sup>18</sup>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.”
- 1. Definitions:
    - a. *Mark* means to “look at, behold, watch, contemplate, to fix one’s eyes upon or direct one’s attention to.”
    - b. *Avoid* means to “turn away from, to keep aloof from, or to shun one.” This carries the idea of withdrawing fellowship.
    - c. *Divisions* means “to stand apart or divide.”
    - d. *Offences* comes from a word which originally meant the movable stick or trigger of a trap (the part to which the bait is attached.)
      - (1) It then came to mean the trap itself.
      - (2) It applies to any impediment which would cause one to stumble or fall.
  - 2. Some applications:
    - a. Should they only mark and avoid those who teach false doctrine who were members at Rome?
    - b. If a false teacher came from another congregation, would the Roman congregation have to extend fellowship to the false teacher?
    - c. Is the Roman church limited to their own congregation?
      - (1) If several false teachers formed a congregation, the Roman church would mark and avoid (withdraw fellowship) the congregation.

- (2) **If they have the obligation to mark and avoid one false teacher who might be in another congregation, they also would if it were a congregation of false teachers.**
- d. **“If congregations may not withdraw and/or withhold their fellowship from any but their own local members, then congregations are left without defense against identity with and/or attack from one or one hundred apostates from without!” (McClish 435).**
- D. **1 Cor. 10:20-21** <sup>20</sup>“But I *say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils [demons—ASV], and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. <sup>21</sup>Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils.”
  1. The Corinthian church was not to have fellowship with demons.
    - a. If they had fellowship with demons they would not have fellowship with God.
    - b. God and demons are incompatible with each other.
      - (1) Mat. 6:24 <sup>24</sup>“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”
      - (2) Jam. 1:8 <sup>8</sup>“A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.”
      - (3) Jam. 4:4 <sup>4</sup>“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”
  2. What if there was a congregation of demons?
    - a. Could Corinth not fellowship one demon, but they could a congregation of demons?
    - b. Some might say demons were never in fellowship with God.
      - (1) What if they had been in fellowship with God and then became the Corinthian Church of Demons?
      - (2) What if prior to becoming the Church of Demons, Corinth had fellowship with them?
        - (a) Should Corinth continue to fellowship them?
        - (b) Some would say they could not withdraw their fellowship.
        - (c) This would leave the church at Corinth in a strange predicament.
- E. **2 Cor. 6:14-18** <sup>14</sup>“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? <sup>15</sup>And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? <sup>16</sup>And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>17</sup>Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, <sup>18</sup>And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”
  1. **Christians are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.**
  2. **Questions show that God is not in fellowship with those things of Satan.**
  3. **How could this apply to individual Christians but not the congregation at Corinth?**
    - a. **How could individual “come out... and be separate” but the congregation does not have to?**
    - b. **If individuals must withdraw their fellowship, then the congregation would also be required to withdraw its fellowship from any sinful alliance.**
- F. **Eph. 5:11** <sup>11</sup>“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.”
  1. **It is wrong for individual Christians to fellowship the works darkness.**
  2. **If it is wrong for an individual Christian, then it would be wrong for a congregation.**

3. **A Christian cannot fellowship darkness and remain in fellowship with God.**
  4. **How could a congregation have fellowship with darkness and remain in fellowship with God?**
  5. **A once faithful congregation that apostatizes:**
    - a. **Must other faithful congregations continue to support it simply because it is a sister congregation?**
    - b. **Being another congregation does not void the obligation of Christians or congregations to have no fellowship and reproofing them.**
- G. 1 John 1:3-8** <sup>3</sup>That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. <sup>5</sup>This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”
1. **It is discussing individual Christians.**
    - a. **To have fellowship with God, he must walk in the light.**
    - b. **If he ceases walking in the light, then fellowship with God ceases.**
  2. **God cannot have fellowship with one who is walking in sin.**
    - a. **God is too pure to associate with sin.**
    - b. **Hab. 1:13** <sup>13</sup>*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”*
    - c. **1 Pet. 3:12** <sup>12</sup>*For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”*
  3. **Would this be limited to individuals and not congregation?**
    - a. **If a congregation is walking in the light:**
      - (1) **It has fellowship with God.**
      - (2) **It would have fellowship with all others in fellowship with God.**
    - b. **If one stops walking in the light and now walking in darkness:**
      - (1) **God no longer has fellowship with that congregation.**
      - (2) **If God will not fellowship a congregation, then other congregations must not fellowship them.**
      - (3) **Other congregations must withdraw their fellowship.**
- H. 2 John 7-11** <sup>7</sup>For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. <sup>9</sup>Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup>If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: <sup>11</sup>For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”
1. **Four injunctions:**
    - a. **Love; 2 John 5** <sup>5</sup>*And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.”*
    - b. **Obedience; 2 John 6** <sup>6</sup>*And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.”*
    - c. **Vigilance; 2 John 7-9** <sup>7</sup>For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. <sup>9</sup>Whosoever transgresseth, and

- abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”
- d. Refusal of error; 2 John 10-11 “<sup>10</sup>If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: <sup>11</sup>For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”
2. Many deceivers in the world.
    - a. *Deceivers* are those who lead people astray or someone who corrupts the truth.
    - b. John mentions one type of deceiver:
      - (1) Those who deny the fact and possibility that Christ came in the flesh.
      - (2) These deceivers are antichrist, or those who are opposed to Him.
    - c. We must always watch and be vigilant against false teaching of any type.
      - (1) They will lead us astray and destroy our Christian service.
      - (2) They will eventually cause us to lose our reward in heaven if we follow them.
      - (3) Only by remaining faithful can we enjoy heaven as our home.
  3. The “doctrine of Christ”
    - a. When one transgresses and does not remain in the doctrine of Christ, he is separated from God.
    - b. There are two main positions concerning the phrase.
      - (1) Objective genitive: the doctrine about Christ and His deity—that He has come in the flesh.
      - (2) Subjective genitive: the totality of teaching which comes from Christ, or the totality of the **New Testament** teaching.
      - (3) Some hold that it is both while others do not think it makes any difference.
    - c. Reasons to believe it is subjective genitive.
      - (1) The parallelism in 2 John.
        - (a) It is synonymous parallelism but in sections not lines.
        - (b) “Truth” in verses 1, 2, 3, and 4
        - (c) “Commandment(s)” in verses 4, 5, and 6
        - (d) “Doctrine” in verses 9, and 10
        - (e) These three terms are equivalent referring to the entirety of the **New Testament**.
        - (f) These show the thrust of the letter which is subjective and not objective (the antichrist doctrine).
      - (2) John’s emphasis on keeping the commandments.
        - (a) This is the emphasis of the book.
        - (b) The Truth:
          - i) “dwelleth in us” (v. 2)
          - ii) it shall “be with us for ever” (v. 2)
          - iii) John found that the elect lady’s children “walking in truth” (v. 3)
          - iv) “as we have received a commandment” (v. 3)
          - v) love is “walk[ing] after his commandments” (v. 6)
          - vi) We are to “look to yourselves” (v. 8)
            - a) So we will “receive a full reward” (v. 8)
            - b) This is only accomplished by obedience to all God’s laws.

- (c) We then come the “doctrine of Christ.”
    - i) Those abiding in it have fellowship with God.
    - ii) Those who do not abide in it do not have fellowship with God.
  - (d) John gave this emphasis in other books.
    - i) John 14:15, 21, 23-24 “<sup>15</sup>If ye love me, keep my commandments.... <sup>21</sup>He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.... <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. <sup>24</sup>He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.”
    - ii) John 15:10, 14 “<sup>10</sup>If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.... <sup>14</sup>Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”
    - iii) 1 John 5:2-3 “<sup>2</sup>By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. <sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”
  - (3) Grammar
    - (a) Either subjective or objective is possible from the Greek grammar.
    - (b) A few verses earlier; 2 John 6 “<sup>6</sup>And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.”
      - i) “his commandments” is the same construction.
      - ii) It could be rendered “the commands of him” as verse 9 “the teaching of the Christ.”
    - (c) The phrase in verse 6 is subjective genitive, so why would we not take the same phraseology in verse 9 the same way.
  - (4) Parallel Passages
    - (a) Mat. 16.
      - i) Mat. 16:6 “<sup>6</sup>Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”
      - ii) They misunderstand and Jesus reproves them.
      - iii) Mat. 16:12 “<sup>12</sup>Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”
    - (b) Acts 2:42 “<sup>42</sup>And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
      - i) “apostles’ doctrine” is the same construction as “doctrine of Christ.”
      - ii) It is the doctrine which they taught.
  - (5) Bible’s teaching on the limits of fellowship (all the ones we are studying).
  - d. Only reason to think it is the doctrine about Christ and His deity is because some do not wish to be confined to the limitation of Biblical fellowship.
  - e. The one who goes beyond that doctrine no longer has fellowship with God.
    - (1) What if a congregation is at one time faithful to the Truth, then transgresses it?
    - (2) The congregation no longer has fellowship with God.
4. If one comes bringing false doctrine.
- a. We are not to receive him into our house.
    - (1) Would be to provide assistance in what they are doing and teaching.

- (2) We are not to bid him fellowship.
  - b. We are not to bid him God speed.
    - (1) "God speed" means "a greeting."
    - (2) We are not to do anything which could be interpreted by others as an endorsement of his teaching and actions.
  - c. Just as wrong to bid "God speed" to an apostate congregation as an apostate individual.
    - (1) If an individual departs from Christ's teaching, we must withdraw our fellowship from him.
    - (2) As long as a congregation abides in the teaching of Christ, other congregations are in fellowship with it.
    - (3) If a congregation departs from Christ's doctrine, then other congregations must withdraw their fellowship.
5. Bidding God speed to one who is not in fellowship with God means we are partakers of his evil.
  - a. *Partaker* is elsewhere translated fellowship.
  - b. If we fellowship a false teacher, we become morally culpable in his evil.
  - c. If we are morally culpable in someone else's evil, then we are separated from God.
  - d. If it is a congregation, the situation would be exactly the same.
    - (1) If a congregation apostatizes, and another congregation extends fellowship to it, then they are morally culpable with them.
    - (2) They are then separated from God.
    - (3) Instead to remain in fellowship with God a congregation must withdraw from an apostate congregation.
- I. Rev. 2:5 "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."
  1. Ephesus was still in fellowship with God.
    - a. Sin was in the congregation.
    - b. They needed to repent of that sin.
  2. Candlestick or lamp stand
    - a. A figure to show the presence of God and His fellowship.
    - b. Its purpose was to uphold and dispense light.
    - c. To remove it would be to take away the light from that congregation.
    - d. God gave them time to repent and if they didn't then He would no longer fellowship them.
  3. Sister congregations: Smyrna and Philadelphia
    - a. There was nothing but praise as they were walking in the light.
      - (1) They fellowship all those in fellowship with God
      - (2) They withdraw from those whom God withdraws from.
    - b. Ephesus had been faithful, so they had fellowship with them.
    - c. Time passes and Ephesus does not repent.
      - (1) God removes their candlestick; He no longer has fellowship with them.
      - (2) Smyrna and Philadelphia must recognize what God has done.
        - (a) They then must withdraw their fellowship from that apostate church.

- (b) If they fail to withdraw, they are no longer walking according to Truth.
  - i) Eph. 5:11 “<sup>41</sup>And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*”
  - ii) If they fail to withdraw, they are then partakers of Ephesus’ evil for bidding them “God speed.”
- (3) ““But the fact that the Lord could take this action does not mean that a congregation can,’ someone may object. All right, let us test this objection. Suppose Ephesus did not repent and the Lord identified her as an apostate church which He could not fellowship. What should the faithful churches of Asia do? Would they please the Lord by continuing to fellowship her or by refusing to withdraw fellowship from her? Would they displease the Lord by following His example and withdrawing fellowship from her? To insist that one congregation cannot identify another congregation as apostate (and thereupon withdraw fellowship from it) is to insist that it is unscriptural to follow the example of the Lord Himself!” (Dub McClish 439).

## V. SOME OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

### A. No Command

1. There is no direct statement authorizing one congregation to withdraw from a sister congregation.
2. The Bible also authorizes implicitly without the need for a direct statement.
3. As has been seen the Bible does authorize this action implicitly.
4. This is the same type of argument that helped produce anti-ism in years past.

### B. Violates Congregational Autonomy

1. The Scriptures teach each congregation is autonomous (self-ruling).
  - a. Each congregation is overseen by elders who pastor the flock among them.
    - (1) Acts 20:28-32 “<sup>28</sup>Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. <sup>29</sup>For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup>Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup>Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. <sup>32</sup>And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”
    - (2) 1 Pet. 5:2 “<sup>2</sup>Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;”
  - b. Elders make decisions in optional matters regarding the work of the congregation they oversee.
  - c. They have no right to make decisions upon another congregation of God’s people.
2. The elders withdrawing from a sister congregation does not violate the rights of that sister congregation.
  - a. They have not tried to supplant the elders of the sister congregation.
  - b. They have not tried to remove the rights of the sister congregation to make the decisions they so desire.
3. The elders of the congregation who withdraws is protecting its flock.
  - a. They are making decisions for their congregation, not any other.

- b. They are stopping the mouth's of the false teacher.
  - (1) Tit. 1:9-11 “<sup>9</sup>Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. <sup>10</sup>For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: <sup>11</sup>Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.”
  - (2) When the gainsayers are a sister congregation, they must stop their mouth by withdrawing fellowship from them.
    - (a) They are stopping their mouths by warning their members of the dangers of the sister congregation.
    - (b) By doing so they are taking care of their flock; Acts 20:28 “<sup>28</sup>Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”
- c. They are dealing with their own flock, not some other.
4. “This has been one of the favorite allegations of those of the ‘anti’ persuasion for almost half a century as they have opposed congregational cooperation. Ironically, some are now using the same baseless objection to oppose the practice of congregational ‘discooperation’ (withdrawal of fellowship)” (Dub McClish 442).

**Conclusion:** Some might argue that we cannot know if a congregation is out of fellowship with God. When a congregation no longer walks in the light of God’s Word, God withdraws His fellowship from them. “When a church with deliberate purpose of forethought engages and willfully persists in anything that is contrary to the doctrine of Christ, said church does not have God in the doing of it (2 John 9-11). The same would be true of a church that ‘stumbled’ into error, but refused to repent after being taught the truth on the matter” (David Brown “May” 78). When God no longer fellowships a congregation, then sister congregations are obligated to withdraw their fellowship to remain in fellowship with God.