

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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What Do We Withdraw?

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There are times in a local church when withdrawing from a brother or sister is necessary.

Paul rebuked the brethren in Corinth from being slow to put away from among themselves the wicked brother living in sin, and then exhorted the brethren in Thessalonica to withdraw from any one who is walking disorderly or out of step with God's revealed truth (*I Corinthians 5:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:6*).

It is common when the formal announcement of withdrawal is made, we hear we are “*withdrawing our fellowship*” from a brother or sister. How do you interpret such a statement? Scripturally speaking, are we literally “*withdrawing fellowship*”? ?

The Greek word translated “*fellowship*” denotes a *sharing in common*. With thanksgiving we share in common or have communion of the body and blood of Christ as we partake of the bread and the cup in the Lord's supper (*I Cor. 10:16*). Philemon was praised for the “*fellowship of thy faith*” or the sharing of his working faith which manifested itself in refreshing the hearts of the

saints (*Philemon 1:6-7*). Paul shared in or had fellowship with the Philippians by receiving the help they gave (*Philippians 4:15*).

No fellowship or sharing in common exists between righteousness and iniquity (*2 Corinthians 6:14*). Continuing to walk in the Light as God is in the light is essential to having fellowship with God (*I John 1:6-7*). When people walk disorderly or continue in their in sin they have severed fellowship with God. So, what are we withdrawing? It is not fellowship, for that has already ceased to exist.

Do we mean we are “*withdrawing our approval*” from a brother or sister who is now walking disorderly, when we say we are withdrawing fellowship? Approval and fellowship, though distinctive in meaning, accompany one another. For example, James, Cephas (Peter) and John gave “*the right hands of fellowship*” to Paul and Barnabas (*Galatians 2:9-10*). What they shared in common was preaching the truth of the Gospel, and not forgetting the poor as Peter focused upon the Jews and Paul upon the Gentiles. Extended was the right hand, indicating approval

as they shared in common the truth and demands of the gospel of Christ.

Imagine for a moment what would have happened if Paul ceased to preach the truth of the Gospel or refused to remember the poor. Peter might withdraw his right hand which once indicated recognition and approval of Paul's works, but fellowship would have already ceased. A formal statement might be made recognizing fellowship with God has already ceased with one in such sin, but that is different from saying we are now “*withdrawing fellowship from Paul*.” What we really mean is we are withdrawing our approval as fellowship has ceased.

Speaking as the oracles of God, Christians are commanded to “*withdraw yourselves*” from the brother walking disorderly. This involves one to “*have no company*” with the brother or sister who is walking out of step with the Lord (*2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14*). We are “*not to keep company*” with a brother or sister who is persistent in their sin, “*with such a one, no, not to eat*” (*I Corinthians 5:11*). We withdraw ourselves, recognizing fellowship has ceased.