

Christian Accountability & The Fear of God

What provides the motivation for Christians to live a holy life since we already possess redemption from sin before God in our Lord Jesus? What holds us accountable to God, if we are already sealed by the Holy Spirit and guaranteed future glory (Eph. 1:7, 13-14)? The answer to this question is crucial if we are to live a life which is pleasing to Him. For, our Father has allocated a significant portion of His Word which provides direction for this kind of lifestyle, and He frequently emphasizes the need for us to implement it.

The God-given factors designed to help us achieve this goal are: 1) Conviction of the Holy Spirit within individual believers through knowledge gained from the Word of God, and 2) Mutual interaction between Christians which includes discipline of Body members and Church leaders. Each of these relationships is interconnected, for they all function around our Savior's moral standards and are governed by the *Fear of God*. God desires each believer in the Body to be properly managed by His principles which form the foundation for Christian responsibility and godliness.

The Fear of God Defined:

It is fundamental to develop an understanding of what the *Fear of God* is before discussing how it relates to various Christian applications. The Greek word translated "fear" (φοβος) does not simply mean *respect* as is often taught. The usage of this word in the New Testament encompasses the idea of *being scared* or *something to be afraid of*. Negative ramifications are directly related to "fear" ("φοβος", as well as "φοβεομαι" the verb form) in contexts where this word is used.

As an action word, it refers to Peter "being afraid" of the Law keeping Jews in Jerusalem which caused him to hypocritically abandon the Grace principle of accepting gentile believers as equals with the Jewish brethren (Gal. 2:12). Also, this noun is used to describe "fear" slaves should have in regard to the consequences of not obeying their masters, even if their owners are not just and fair (1 Pet. 2:18). And, in Romans 13:3, this word is used to define the "fear" believers are supposed to have in regard to punishments related to disobeying the dictates of divinely established governmental authority. The English word "phobia" is a transliteration of this word.

So, what does this *Fear of God* involve for believers? For, we already stand acceptable before God "in Christ", and we presently occupy the secure position of being righteous in His presence (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:21). In conjunction with this

state, the “wrath” we would otherwise face is no longer in the picture, but we are headed toward “glory” (Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 5:9). This “fear” has nothing to do with the future, guaranteed, eternal state of being with our Lord, which we are promised. Nor does it have to do with the present, acceptable position we have before God as we stand in Christ. This “fear” is solely about the accountability our Lord has given us to obey Him between the time He saved us by His Grace and the time we will be with our Lord after death or when He returns to glorify us into His image.

In Second Corinthian 5:10-11, we are told: “For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, in order that each one may receive back the things done through the body which he practiced, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing, the fear of the Lord, we persuade men . . .” This passage shows the “fear of the Lord” is associated with the “judgment seat of Christ”. More specifically, this “fear” is directed toward “receiving back” for the “bad” we do while we are believers here on earth. It is also clear, in the letters of Paul, the “good” we do after we become believers will reap rewards (1 Cor. 3:14; Col. 3:24).

Now, the phrase, the “fear of the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:11) does not mean we should be afraid of God, Himself. The word “Lord” (κυριου) in this passage is in the *genitive* case, which designates the concept of *association*. The meaning is: we should have a “fear” of *something which is associated* with our Lord. In the context, this plainly refers to what will happen at the “judgment seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10).

The word translated “receive back” (κομισηται – 2 Cor. 5:10) means we will *receive* or *get repayment* for the “good or bad” we have done. To gain a better understanding of what this word means, in Matthew 25:27, it is used in regard to *getting back* money with interest. In First Peter 1:9, believers will *receive back* “salvation of” their “souls” as the end result of faith. Finally, it is used twice regarding slaves, once depicting the “good” they will “receive back” for obedience to the Lord (Eph. 6:8) and regarding those who do wrong, they will be “repaid” for their “wrongs” (Col. 3:25).

The concept we will *get paid back* for our “bad” deeds refers to the penalty resulting from these deeds. Even though our sin is already paid for by Christ’s death on the cross which qualifies each believer to be acceptable before the Father, some of these same sins – the ones we practice after becoming Christians – will be dealt with by our Lord at His judgment seat. This will happen because when God saved us He also gave us His Spirit who enables us to desire and obey His Word. (Phil. 2:12-13). The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to give us understanding. Then, He uses this knowledge to convict us toward the goal of obedience (1 Cor. 2:12; 1 Thess. 2:13). In Galatians 5:16, we are commanded to

walk by the Spirit so we will not complete lusts associated with the flesh. Also, we are told to be filled with the Spirit so we will not live a secular lifestyle (Eph. 5:18). With the power of the Holy Spirit, which is provided by God to enable us to live the Christian life, we are without an excuse and personally accountable when we disobey.

Therefore, when we do not use this power God has given so we can obey His commands, we have reason to “fear” God. With the knowledge about how the “fear of the Lord” works, Paul says, “we persuade” (πειθομεν) “men” (2 Cor. 5:11). By use of this Greek verb, he was *convincing* and *winning over* men to this understanding so they would not suffer the consequences the Holy Spirit is warning us about in verse 10. One of God’s primary purposes for His children is for us to exercise our volition in a responsible way toward our circumstances. He wants us to choose to utilize the power He has made available to us in the Holy Spirit so we will be able to live in a righteous manner pleasing to Him (Rom. 6:16, 7:4-6; Eph. 1:19).

What are the consequences of this “receiving back” and “repayment” if we choose not to obey? The best answer for this resides in First Corinthians 3:12-15. Verse 15 says we “will be caused to suffer loss” for the works that do not survive the fiery test in that “day” (v. 13 – when the judgment seat of Christ will happen). Yet, it is unquestionably clear this judgment has no relation to any believer’s salvation, for it says, “he himself will be saved” (v. 15).

So what is the nature of that which we “will be caused to suffer loss” (ζημιωθησεται) at the judgment seat of Christ? This same Greek word is used in Philippians 3:8, where Paul says, “I was caused to suffer the loss (εζημιωθην) of all things . . . in order that I might gain Christ.” Here, this verb is in the *passive voice*, which means an *outside force caused* Paul to lose all the things he possessed which gave him reason to boast in his flesh before he was saved (Phil. 3:4-7). Contextually, this force had to be God, Himself. Also, this verb is in the *aorist tense* and *indicative mode* which combined specifies this had already happened as a *completed action in the past*. This passage is pointing to what transpired in Acts 9:1-19, when Jesus Christ saved Paul on the road to Damascus.

When Paul was saved, he effectively “suffered loss” of all the things that gave him reason to boast as a Jewish man (Phil. 3:5-7). Just as Paul’s fleshly works were discounted as having any value toward his salvation, in the same way, our fleshly works during our Christian experience must be expelled before we are ultimately glorified. At that time, we will suffer the loss of our *sinful ego* and *anything that has to do with our Old Man*. These things will be burned by fire so we can be purged of

our flesh and changed into conformity with our Lord in glory (1 Cor. 3:15; Phil. 3:20-21). Jesus Christ, as the outside force, will do this when He judges us.

Just a few verses after alerting us we will “be caused to suffer loss”, it says anyone who “corrupts” (φθειρει), or *does moral/ethical damage to* the temple of God (the Body of Christ), God “will corrupt” (*future tense of the same word*) this one. That is, He will undo this *moral/ethical damage* by burning it with fire (1 Cor. 3:17). Based on the context in which this statement is found, it is referring to what will happen at the judgment seat.

In Second Timothy, immediately following his discourse about the need for Timothy to hold to and suffer for the message given to him, Paul says, “All in Asia forsook me” (1:11-15). Then, he says, “May the Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus” (v. 16). “*Mercy*” is only required when we have need to be delivered from a negative reality we would not want to endure. According to this passage, this household of Christians was among the believers who abandoned Paul during his trial and death sentence in Rome rather than supporting him and his message (v. 15). The latter would have been the right thing for fellow Christians to do (2 Tim. 1:8, 12; 2:3, 15; 4:6). In truth, to stand up with Paul would have been exceedingly fearful. For, if they had been judged to be accomplices with Paul in relation to the gospel he preached, they could have been given the same verdict of execution which he received.

A few verses later, Paul reaffirms the necessity for “mercy” in this situation as he writes, “May the Lord give to him to find mercy from the Lord in that day” (2 Tim. 1:18). The word translated “to him” (αυτω) could refer to Onesiphorus, himself, or to his “house” (οικω - v. 16). In either case, it does not change the meaning regarding believers giving an account for their actions to the Lord “in that day” (the day of judgment for believers). There must be significant, adverse ramifications as a result of these kinds of earthly actions “in that day” or why would the Holy Spirit have directed Paul to appeal to God for “mercy” in their behalf two separate times?

In conjunction with the greater context of this passage, Paul asks God to grant “mercy” to Timothy, himself (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). The word, “mercy”, is not used in any salutation of the other eleven letters signed by Paul, just in the two addressed to Timothy. It looks as if he had a problem standing up strong enough as “a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3). The implication is Timothy was “ashamed” of the gospel and scared of the associated imprisonment Paul suffered as a result of preaching this message (2 Tim. 1:7-8; 2:15). Also, he infers Timothy had a problem of being directed by “fear” (2 Tim. 1:7). And, he was not fully willing to “suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8;

2:3). Timothy, along with all of us, will have to give an account to God for times when we compromise what He wants us to do when it comes to serving Him.

The Apostle John speaks in a similar manner when he says, “whenever He may be manifest, we might have boldness and not be made ashamed from Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28). The phrase “from Him” indicates the believer will “be made ashamed” or *disgraced directly from the Lord Jesus Christ*, our Judge, “at His coming” – the time of the judgment seat. This can only be pointing to the final consequence of sinful works which believers produce after we have been saved.

If you are in the theological camp which believes our ungodly works will simply result in loss of rewards, please meditate on the passages just considered. Since the reformation, so much emphasis has been placed on the fact that salvation is by faith apart from works that this concept has permeated into and been applied to the *Christian life*, which follows *salvation*. Whereas, the Scriptures clearly present these as two different happenings – totally separate events. There are serious consequences related to whether we obey God in our lives or not. We should endeavor to please Him which will yield the outcome of “rewards”, “praise” and the “hope, joy and crown of boasting” (1 Cor. 3:14; 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:19-20).

Applying the Fear of God to Daily Life:

Having considered what the *Fear of God* involves, let us proceed to how we can apply the principles associated with it in our lives. How are we to facilitate this concept in our walk for the Lord? Under what circumstances does it apply? And, what should the role of both the application and awareness of the judgment seat play in our thinking? The following passages give some answers to these questions.

Theology behind Integrating the Fear of God

Philippians 2:12-13 teaches how we can live our lives in a way which avoids the pitfalls of the judgment seat. Here, Paul writes, “So that, my beloved . . . with fear and trembling, work out your own salvation; for it is God who works in you both to will and to work in behalf of the good pleasure.” Here, the verb translated “work out” (κατεργαζεσθε) means to *put into effect* or *put into action* our salvation. This does not mean to *gain* salvation, but to *enact the salvation we already have*. Specifically, it is directed toward our Christian walk during the time we spend on earth after we have been saved.

The word translated “work out” is in the *imperative mode*, which means we are *commanded* to do this. It is also in the *present tense*, which emphasizes we are to

do it *continually*. Finally, the *middle voice* of this word indicates *we are to act upon ourselves* to put our salvation into effect. The combination of these three grammatical elements means we are *commanded to continually cause ourselves to put our salvation into action*. Therefore, the indication is: we have both the *ability* and the *responsibility* to put into effect the salvation God has given to us (Phil. 1:28-29).

Note, it says we are to do this “with fear and trembling”. This phrase is used four times by Paul showing the “fear” (φοβου) of God is a significant factor in prodding us to walk in obedience to Him (1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5). In addition to the concept of “fear”, the need for “trembling” (τρομου) is mentioned. We get our English word “tremble” from the verb form and it indicates we should metaphorically *tremor* or *shake* before our Lord as we earnestly pursue a life of obedience. One Christian group took this idea so literally they called themselves “Quakers” as they sought to live a holy life before God.

Prior to salvation, in our flesh, we were at “enmity” with God. We were not “subject” to His Law, we were “not able” to be, and we were in a state where we could “not please God” (Rom 8:7-8). So, what has changed which gives us the capability to carry out this process of putting our salvation into action? The next verse explains the foundational reason behind why we “desire” to obey God and how we can “do the good pleasure”. It is because we have been given these abilities through God, the Holy Spirit, who is “working in us” (Phil. 2:13). After being placed in Christ for justification before God and after receiving the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and power, we find ourselves in a new, morally alive state in which we no longer have excuses when it comes to obeying our Lord (Rom. 6:11-12, 18, 22).

The Fear of God Applied to Social Status

Another passage which helps us to apply principles related to the *Fear of God* is Colossians 3:22-25. Here, Christian slaves are told to obey their earthly masters with sincerity of heart while “fearing the Lord” (v. 22). If this is not being done, each one “will be repaid (κομίζεται) for the wrong he has done”. That is, he will be *paid back for* or *receive the consequences* of his works which violate God’s standards (2 Cor. 5:10). And, this will happen with no “partiality” as God judges all believers the same (v.25). God expects the slave, who has limited human rights and freedoms, to obey Him just as He expects any believer to obey Him, even in adverse circumstances (1 Pet. 2:18-22). The eternal rewards of obedience for a Christian far outweigh any temporal inconveniences we may suffer (Rom. 8:18; Col. 3:24).

Even believing Masters need to recognize they will be held accountable for how they treat their slaves (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1). They, too, will give an account directly to

their Lord (Jesus) for their actions as believers, including all aspects of interaction with their slaves. Again, in that day, there will be “no partiality” (Col. 3:25).

Evangelism is affected by The Fear of God

In First Corinthians 2:1-5, we get a unique view of applying the *Fear of God* to evangelism. Here, Paul is retracing the history of how he approached them when he first came to their city to share salvation in Jesus Christ (Acts 18). In this passage, he is trying to emphasize to the believers at Corinth that they are not to affiliate themselves with men because of the resultant strife and disunity it had caused among them. However, *they are to associate themselves with Jesus Christ*, the One all believers have in common (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:23; 4:6).

To remedy the Corinthian problem of believers associating themselves with men, Paul gives himself as an example by reminding them how he originally presented himself to them. He says he came to them “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” in conjunction with his determination to know nothing among them “except Jesus Christ and this one having been crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2-3). Paul had always unmistakably directed them toward Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Therefore, they were to identify themselves with Him alone, not with Paul or any other man (1 Cor. 1:12-13; 2:2, 16; 3:10-11, 21-23).

To accomplish the goal of connecting believers with their all-important Head, Paul says, “I came not according to superiority of word or wisdom” when he proclaimed the message of the cross to them (1 Cor. 1:17-18; 2:1). He also says, “My word (message) and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in the display of the Spirit and power” (2:4). The next verse gives us the reason why Paul approached them in this way; “in order that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (v. 5).

Paul realized it was the message of the cross which saved men, and this message was considered “foolish” by men (1 Cor. 1:18, 25). He also knew that God’s chosen called ones would respond with faith as they were directed by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:21, 24, 26-31; 2:4). So, he did not want their faith to be based on him coming across with *strong, superior, and persuasive speech, preaching, and human wisdom*. But, he came to them with humble “fear and trembling” so they would truly know that God saved them by His foolish (in the eyes of men) message, which is based upon Christ’s blood sacrifice on the cross.

By his actions, Paul was demonstrating that he, as an example for every Christian, is simply a feeble envoy of God’s message (1 Cor. 3:5-9; 4:1-2, 6). He took seriously God’s desire for men to know *Who* and *what* saves them. For, he knew

he would be held accountable at the judgment seat of Christ for directing men to God, beginning with his evangelism and continuing in all aspects of his ministry to believers. This is one more real-life scenario in which Paul shows how “fear and trembling” influenced his life and ministry.

Universal Application to the Christian Life

Ephesians 5:21 is a passage which regards the universal application of the *Fear of God* to our lives as believers. Here, Paul is instructing Christians how to “walk” (live our lives) as “wise ones” by understanding “what the will of the Lord is” from His Word, while we are being “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:15-18). Involved in this is “being subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (v. 21). Just as wives are to be *subject* to their husbands in all things (vv. 22-24) and husbands are to be *subject* to God’s command to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (vv. 25-30), all believers are to *mutually* and *continually* (present tense) be “subject” to one another “in the fear of Christ” (Phil. 2:3). This should be done with the knowledge that we will be held responsible for our actions by our Judge, Christ, at the judgment seat.

Concluding this section, God wants His children to live a life of obedience before Him. We know He will reward us for good works which are consistent with the truth in His Word when these actions are accompanied by godly character, attitudes and motives engendered in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we defy God’s standards, we need to recognize these actions will not go unpunished. For, God is not only a loving God, but a just God. To encourage obedience, He wants each one of us to “discipline” our self “toward godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). The Greek word “godliness” (εὐσεβείαν) is built from two words meaning “*good fear*”. While we live life mindful that we are accountable to our Creator in regard to compliance with His revealed Will, we can make use of His “good” incentive of “fear”, which will help qualify us as “a good minister of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 4:6).

Discipline in the Church based on the Fear of God:

Today, many of the standards the Church uses for discipline are based on First Corinthians, chapter 5. Here, one who is a professing brother is to be dealt with by the Church because he is committing fornication with his father’s wife. It is important to take a close look at this passage so we can properly apply the principles found within it.

Taking a Stand against Destructive Behavior

First, the participle translated “being called a brother” (1 Cor. 5:11) could also be rendered: “calling himself a brother”. By form, it can be in the *passive voice* indicating that *others recognize him as a brother*, a believer. It can also be interpreted as the *middle voice*, which would emphasize *he is claiming he is a believer by his own confession*. In either case, the only condition upon which Church discipline should be exercised is when a person is a professing Christian. As men, we have to proceed based on a person’s declaration, for only God truly knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19). As a side-note, it is amazing to me when brothers and sisters fall into the sins mentioned in this chapter, a common immediate response is: ‘This person must not really know the Lord’. As we observe the context, it will become evident this was not Paul’s approach to these situations.

After learning about a professing believer’s sin, the determination must be made as to whether this particular sin will morally or ethically “leaven” or *corrupt* the local assembly (1 Cor. 5:6). The Holy Spirit specifically records the kinds of sin which are to be dealt with in the manner prescribed in this passage. Verse 11 lists six classifications of sin that qualify.

A “fornicator” (πορνός) is the first one listed. Our English word “porn” comes from this word. It covers any sexual activity outside of marriage, which includes fornication, adultery, pornography, homosexuality, molestation and relations with animals. It is clear the influence of allowing these actions to go unchecked would “leaven the whole lump” of the assembly (1 Cor. 5:6, 6:15-20).

The second word, “the covetous” (πλεονεκτής) comes from two words meaning to “have more”. This word is only used in lists found in the New Testament, but it is used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) in the noun form to portray *taking more than one’s share*, *taking advantage* and *greediness* (Psa. 119:36; Jer. 22:17; Hab. 2:9). This gets into the area of abusing the rights and properties of others in the Body, which is a debasing influence (cf. 1 Thess. 4:6).

Next, “an idolater” (ειδωλολατρής) is closely associated with the *covetousness* just mentioned (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). It literally means *an idol server*, and can refer to actually serving false gods or catering toward anything which dominates one’s life toward evil. Those controlled by motivational factors which are contrary to the Lord and His Word are dangerous to the Body (1 Cor. 6:12).

Forth in the list is “a slanderer” (λοιδορός). This is a person who uses *abusive*, *reviling* and *blasphemous* speech or actions to assassinate the character of

others. This word is related to our adversary, the Devil, and often incorporates half-truths to turn people against someone (1 Tim. 5:14). Believers are not to practice this, so they are certainly not to be exposed to it as acceptable behavior (1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:23).

“A drunkard” (μεθυσος) is not to be tolerated in the Church. If accepted, the negative moral influence of a person who has an out-of-control addiction can create a devastating effect on other believers. Christians are directed to be controlled by the power of the Holy Spirit for good, not controlled by a substance which deadens their moral choices resulting in wrong-doing (Rom. 12:21; 1 Cor. 6:12; Eph. 5:18).

Last, “a swindler” (αρπαξ) is not to go unchecked. This word refers to *one who snatches* and is a person who *robs* from others, deceitfully *taking* from people what is rightfully theirs. This can be outward theft or it may surface in the form of conning or cheating someone. This influence would degrade the ethics among the body of believers.

Now that we have taken a brief look at six kinds of sin the Holy Spirit chose to showcase for stern action, let’s consider what is to be done about them. In verse 6, it says, “your boast is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” The word translated “your” is plural, referring to the whole assembly in Corinth. The fact that they are not condemning those sinning in this manner ultimately indicates they are condoning these actions. Therefore, they have “become puffed up” (1 Cor. 5: 2), *proud* and *arrogant* against God’s principles and are satisfied to “boast” (v.6) and *brag* about their own humanistic, sinful standards associated with this Satan-dominated age.

To cure this moral ailment, the Corinthian believers are to “clean out the old leaven, in order that you might be a new lump, according as you are unleavened ones. For, our Passover, Christ, was sacrificed” (v. 7). When we accept the leaven of sin in our midst, which inevitably causes a morally degrading influence, we are denying the central purpose for which our Savior died on the cross. God provided salvation to us through Jesus Christ to prepare a people delivered from the evil of sin and separated for His possession to do good works (Titus 2:11-14).

So, Paul prescribes the antidote to deal with these unrepentant believers. The Corinthians are “to deliver such a one to Satan unto the destruction of the flesh in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5). It is important for Christians to achieve a sufficient level of *non-acceptance* and *separation* with these brethren so that the Church will not be harmfully influenced by their actions. As these believers are abandoned by the assembly and

experience an array of discouragements associated with the fleshly realm of this world, of which Satan is god, the goal is to bring them to repentance. This involves “the destruction of the flesh”, that is, the sin-producing flesh must be put off and put to death (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5ff). If the person does repent as a result of this punishment, he will gain something of value in the spiritual realm when he stands before the judgment seat “in the day of the Lord”.

How this discipline is carried out may differ depending on the circumstances, but we do have the instruction not “to mingle together” (συναναμιγνυσθαι) with those who are involved in these sins (v. 11). This word is built from three Greek words which mean to *mix up with*. So we are not to *associate with*, *comingle* or *socialize* with them in any manner which would give the idea we are agreeing with or condoning their actions.

Also, we are told not to “eat together” with them. Fellowshiping over meals is one of the most basic times believers can edify one another. Accepting those who are involved in rampant sin into this setting can ruin the opportunities to build moral character in this intimate environment. Tolerating this kind of moral sin in our midst will automatically result in associated degrading influences upon all those present.

Ultimately, what the Church should achieve is “that the one having practiced this work might be taken out of your midst” (1 Cor. 5:2). The sinful action in this case is fornication, but all the sins mentioned in verse 11 are to be dealt with in a similar manner. The assembly is to effectively deal with this brother controlled by sin in a way which will protect all of the other brothers and sisters from being affected by his immorality. We do not want to accept this kind of behavior. For, to do so will lower the God-given values which believers are to maintain, making it easier for others to fall into the same rebellious lifestyle. So, we read the final command: “Take the evil one out of your midst” (1 Cor. 5:13).

These believers, though caught up in debilitating sin, do need spiritual guidance. It is incumbent upon knowledgeable and mature brothers and sisters to be available for them when they are ready to repent of their actions and seek godly counsel which can restore them toward rejoining the body of believers. It takes great wisdom to properly carry out this serious responsibility which God has given the Church. This wisdom can only be gained from an absolute balance between understanding His Word and the experience of applying this truth to situations over the process of years. The best qualified Church leaders should be sought out to handle these morally difficult circumstances.

The Goal of Repentance and Restoration

A wonderful aspect of this passage is the fact that we have more revelation telling us about the outcome of this entire scenario. In Second Corinthians chapter 2, we are told this brother who was committing fornication admitted his wrong and ceased sinning in this manner. For, Paul says in verse 6, “This punishment by the majority is sufficient in relation to such a one”. This shows most of the believers in Corinth took the instructions they heard a year earlier seriously and properly disciplined this brother. However, once he had demonstrated a change of heart, they were to “forgive and encourage” him (v. 7). Since Paul instructs them to now show grace, this implies some of the believers were unwilling to adequately forgive him after he had repented. Just as it was necessary to bring initial condemnation to this act, it is equally essential to completely accept him back or he “might be swallowed up in excessive grief” (v. 7). The other believers definitely wouldn’t want to be responsible before God for causing this kind of anguish in another brother or sister.

Furthermore, Paul tells them “I wrote in order that I might know your proof, if you are obedient in reference to all things” (v. 9). If a believer has admitted his sin and has changed, though his actions may have had a destructive impact in the past, the other Christians must truly forgive him “in order that we might not be taken advantage of by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (v. 11). Pride, welling up in Body members, which causes us not to forgive a remorseful brother, is just as bad as pride that forms the foundation causing believers to be initially unwilling to address sin when it is first exposed (1 Cor. 5:2).

In Second Corinthians chapter 7, Paul revisits this incident to make some final points. First, he says, “If I grieved you in the epistle (First Corinthians), I do not regret . . . Now I rejoice, not that you were grieved, but that you were grieved resulting in repentance” (vv. 8-9). Paul was happy the majority of believers did not accept this man’s moral sin, but dealt with it in a godly manner. They “were grieved in accordance with God” (v. 9), which was accompanied by “repentance” or a *change of mind* toward the proper handling of the sin and forgiveness of this brother. This was all “in order that you might not be caused to suffer loss in anything from us” (v. 9). The word translated “caused to suffer loss” here is the same one discussed earlier in First Corinthians 3:15. When believers do not do the right thing, we suffer adversely both now and at the judgment seat of Christ (Gal. 6:7-8).

On the other hand, when believers have a “grief in accordance with God, it produces repentance resulting in salvation without regret” (v.10). This is not speaking about gaining initial acceptance before God, for this salvation is by

Grace alone. Here, it speaks about putting on the characteristics associated with salvation as they are defined in verse 11 (Phil. 2:12; 1 Tim. 4:16). “But the grief associated with the world produces death” (v. 10). Again, this is not eternal death, but ungodly character fruits which result from walking in our sinful nature and for which we will suffer loss when they are burned up (Rom. 6:16; 1 Cor. 3:15; Gal. 6:7-8).

In closing, Paul tells them he did not write these things about this situation for the individual who had done the wrong or for the one who was wronged, “but for your zeal in behalf of us to be made manifest to you in the presence of God” (v.12). The reason the Holy Spirit prompted Paul to write all of this was to see if the assembly would zealously do the right thing and keep the Church morally pure. Titus returned to Paul with the good news about the Corinthian’s obedience in this matter. As a result, Titus’ “spirit was rested” (v. 13) by them and “his affections are abundant” toward them since they “received him with fear and trembling” (v. 15). This completes a spiritual victory for these Christians and was recorded by God to demonstrate how we should handle an immoral act while we are held accountable by the *Fear of God*.

Addressing False Teaching in the Church

Beyond moral sin, grave error in teaching is also unacceptable in the Church. In Titus 3:10, we read, “Reject a heretical man after the first and second admonition”. We really do not have a clear explanation of what a heretical man is in the Scriptures. However, the adjective “heretical” (αιρετικον) is related to the Greek noun “αιρεσις” meaning *that which is taken* or *that which is chosen*. The noun form of this word is generally translated as a “sect” or “heresy”, which is the English transliteration of the word.

There are “destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1), “heresies” which are works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20) and various “sects” – groups considered unacceptable by those who have some common association, but have significantly different beliefs (Acts 5:17; 24:5; 26:5). Paul even says, “It is necessary for heresies to exist among you so that the approved might be manifest among you” (1 Cor. 11:19). God approves of believers who are willing to take a stand against unacceptable deviation from His Word in favor of correct truth. For, in this way, His values are maintained in each assembly and clarified through the process of being tested.

The historical consensus in reference to what Paul says in Titus 3:10, is that he is speaking about brethren who are misguided in regard to their teaching. I agree with this assessment. Heretics habitually *take* or *choose* what they want to believe and promote without adequate Scriptural support for these beliefs. They teach

things such as works for salvation (Acts 15:1; Gal. 2:3-5) and that the resurrection has already happened (2 Tim. 2:18). They are figuratively spoken of as “shipwrecked concerning the faith” (1 Tim. 1:19). Notice, in First Timothy 1:20, how similar the language is in regard to delivering false teachers to Satan compared with what we have already seen in First Corinthians 5:5.

Returning to the Book of Titus, a heretic who is unwilling to be swayed from his error “has turned out (from the truth) and is sinning, being self-condemned” (3:11). At the end of the day, believers need to recognize that certain divisions are necessary and heretical teaching or teachers cannot have part in a healthy assembly. Such a person should be let go, and he will stand condemned before his Lord.

Correcting Irresponsible Believers

Finally, Paul addresses a discipline issue in Thessalonica regarding Christians who are not willing to work and support themselves. In Second Thessalonians 3:6, the believers are instructed “to draw back from every brother walking disorderly”. The Greek adverb translated “disorderly” (ατακτως) means *in a manner which is out of line*. The military designation of *disorderly conduct* is applicable here. First, Paul reminds them he and his associates did not act this way when they first evangelized Thessalonica. But, on the contrary, they gave up their apostolic right to be supported in favor of being an example of what every Christian should be – working in order not to financially burden anyone (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Then, verse 10 outlines the Christian philosophy we are to have toward lazy brethren: “If someone is not willing to work, neither let him eat”. There were disorderly believers in Thessalonica “neither working, but working around” getting work (v. 11). This sounds a lot like the belief of entitlement which pervades our American culture and is working its way into the Church. Paul commands these Christians to become responsible and to work quietly so they can “eat their own bread” (v. 12). He also encourages the faithful brethren, who have been taking responsibility to provide for their own households, “Do not be discouraged while doing good” (v. 13; 1 Tim. 5:8). Work is hard, involving self-control, effort and responsibility. And, this verse pointedly targets the deadening affect slothful Christians have on hard-working believers who are faithfully laboring to support themselves and their families.

Now, if a brother or sister does not pay attention to this divine directive and become financially accountable, the Church is to “mark this one, not to mingle together with him, in order that he might be ashamed” (v. 14). The word translated “mingle together” is the same one used in First Corinthians 5:11. Also, in this

case, believers are not to *comingle* or *socialize* with this brother, but “mark” or *brand* him as an irresponsible brother whose actions are not to be approved of or supported.

Instead, he is supposed to be made to feel “ashamed” or *disgraced*. Our world’s philosophy stresses we should always build up a person’s self-image, often regardless of what they do. Biblical truth teaches us to apply God’s loving principles in order to hold a person accountable for their actions, correct sinful behavior, and help transform each believer’s character in conformity with our Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:24). Of course, we should always admonish fellow believers in a manner which will assure them we are their spiritual friend who wants the best for them and not their enemy (v. 15).

In closing this section, keep in mind that the above mentioned procedures are only to be applied in situations where proliferating sin is tainting the assembly. Most teaching and correction in the Church should happen on a much less traumatic scale than this. In reality, we are all sinners and all need to grow spiritually, putting off our sinful lifestyle which we have inherited as decedents of Adam. Most of the time, believers should receive one another without passing judgment on the other person’s opinions (Rom. 14:1). And, we should major on seeking to build up one another while not judging or despising each other’s beliefs (Rom 14:13, 19). By doing this, we can build lasting relationships with our brothers and sisters, which will give us the opportunity to carry out God’s purpose of edifying the Body. For, in Romans 14:10, it says, “We will all stand beside the judgment seat of God”.

The Need to Hold Christian Leaders Accountable:

When a believer becomes a leader in the Church, it is vital that he has attained and been confirmed to have the character which meets necessary qualifications God has recorded for those in this position (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9). However, at times we may face circumstances where an elder engages in unacceptable, sinful actions which adversely affect the assembly. How is this to be handled? There are some answers for situations like this in First Timothy 5:19-25.

Verse 19 begins with a command: “Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except on the basis of two or three witnesses.” There will always be times when one individual might have a vendetta against an elder. In these cases, by use of the *imperative mode*, we are *commanded* not to listen to this complaint unless there is significant, corroborating testimony to verify the allegation. By taking this approach, innocent elders will be protected from individuals who are willing to promote their own agenda rather than the purity and good of all of the believers in the assembly.

However, if there is adequate, outside testimony supporting the complaint, then it is necessary to take action. In regard to this, the words translated “except” (εκτος ει μη) literally mean *outside of the exception*. Rarely do these words occur together because “εκτος” or “ει μη” each individually mean *except* or *unless*. So, *unless* other testimonies exist to support a grievance against an elder, a person’s accusation should be dismissed. When this word and phrase are used together, they *emphasize the absolute necessity* that legitimate testimony must exist to support the charge which is being made. When solid support does exist, there is no option *except* to address the allegation.

The concept of requiring “two or three witnesses” to validate an accusation is not new, but originates from the standard of judgment God gave in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 19:15, God says: “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses shall the matter be established” (Deut. 17:6-7). Using witnesses to settle disputes is the gold standard of moral jurisprudence – it is God’s standard clearly established in His Word. When this standard is met by adequate testimony in relation to an elder’s sin, the other elders must address it. Otherwise, the potential corrupting influence to the Body of believers can be devastating (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

After an accusation against an elder is examined and found to be justified, the other elders are instructed how to respond to it. They are to “Expose those sinning in the presence of all, in order that the rest might have fear” (1 Tim. 5:20). The word translated “expose” is in the *imperative mode* and signifies this is a *command* which they are required to act upon. The word translated “those sinning” is in the *present tense* indicating the elder in question has been practicing this for some time. It is not simply a momentary lapse of good judgment.

Earlier in the Book, it is taught that a man qualifies to be an elder only if he has the characteristic of being “above reproach” (3:2). Since no Christian is without sin, I believe the indication is: a person who is a qualified elder needs to be walking in the Spirit to the degree when he realizes he is sinning, he will correct himself. Or, when someone points out his sin, he will humbly be willing to change. In contrast, the passage in First Timothy 5:19-25 addresses elders who have become controlled by shameful sin which disqualifies them from being satisfactory examples of Christian character (1 Cor. 6:12; Eph. 5:18).

The consequence for an elder who is unable to be a leader and moral bulwark of the Church is to be “exposed” for all to see. God requires elders to have ethical character which reflects the ideals of His Word because the rest of the believers will base many of their values on the living example of their leaders. Therefore, an

elder's unacceptable actions need to be displayed for all to see "in order that the rest might have fear" (v. 20). The word "fear" (φοβον) is the same word discussed earlier regarding the *Fear of God*. Even though the sin of every elder will ultimately be addressed by our Lord at the judgment seat, it is necessary to be dealt with here and now by the Church because of an elder's overwhelming influence. Each elder should be demonstrating to the assembly that sin has a fearful end. But, if he personally violates this obligation, it is essential for other elders to step up to the plate and take action, in order to maintain righteous standards in the assembly.

Accountability of Church leaders is so important; Paul appeals to Timothy "in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, in order that you might keep these things apart from prejudice, doing nothing according to favoritism" (1 Tim. 5:21). When something is essential, Paul invokes the name of God or Christ when he puts forth what is required to be done. Timothy is to comply with the procedures explaining how to effectively handle complaints against an elder in the above context "apart from prejudice". The two Greek words forming the word "prejudice" (προκριματος) mean *prior judgment*. This means the elders should hold back judgment regarding a complaint until all the facts surrounding the incident are in and verified.

In addition, this judgment needs to be carried out "doing nothing according to favoritism". The word translated "favoritism" (προσκλισιν) is built from two words meaning to *incline toward*. This indicates that the decisions of the other elders in regard to the actions of the accused elder are not to be *slanted* by that person's economic support, social status or of any kind of personal influence he has had in the assembly up to this point of time. This level of objectivity is extremely difficult for men to sustain, but human prejudice and favoritism cannot be contributing factors if the spiritual health of the Church is to be preserved.

To avert demeaning events from happening in an assembly in the first place, it says, "Lay hands on no one quickly" (1 Tim. 5:22). Before someone is recognized as a qualified elder, existing elders need to exercise diligence to ascertain if he is spiritually mature enough to be an example of Christian behavior so the scenario in the preceding verses will not happen. Also, in this regard, Timothy is told not to "participate in others sins; keep yourself holy" (v. 22). God holds each elder individually and personally accountable not to associate themselves as co-leaders with men who are spiritually unqualified to be worthy models. The act of affiliating with a believer or an elder who has known, condemned behavior is really a passive statement demonstrating one condones these sinful actions. When disgraceful conduct is accepted, it results in lowering moral standards for both the elders and the rest of the flock. Inevitably, all who allow these kinds of corrupting influence will take on some of the same character they tolerate.

In conclusion, Paul states it is important to carefully monitor the actions of those desiring to have influence in the assembly, not simply focus on what these people say or know. For “good works are evident beforehand, and those having otherwise (bad works) are not able to be hidden” (1 Tim. 5:25). Adequate time will usually show the character of an individual before he is confirmed as an elder. Whether it is in the confirmation process of a leader or the discipline of existing elders, we must be wise to carefully follow the principles in this passage so the standards of godliness will be maintained in the Church.

What about the Love of God?

It has often been said our lives and ministry should be motivated by the love of God. I do not dispute this, for “the love of Christ constrains us” (2 Cor. 5:14). In fact, there are many passages which teach this same thing. I believe being motivated by God’s love is a reality which exists in the realm of our New Man as we are found in Christ. And, if we were able to have “perfect love”, we would have no “fear” (1 John 4:18). However, it is equally true that we have an Old Man, which is riddled with sin.

In this regard, Paul speaks of his own Christian life in Philippians 3:12-16, indicating he had not attained perfection – a sinless state. For, he still had sin in his life. However, he was pursuing “the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 14). And, ultimately, the best he could do, and we can do, is to utilize the power of the Spirit to conduct our lives in accord with the level of biblical understanding to which we have attained (v. 16). Since it is a fact we are both redeemed, in which state we possess a New Man, and sinners still retaining our Old Man, it should not surprise us that God speaks to us about the *Fear of God* in the same context as the *Love of God* (2 Cor. 5:10-14). Therefore, as those characterized by this spiritual dichotomy, it is necessary for us to be driven by motivational factors which will control our **whole man**.

Concluding Thoughts:

The *Fear of God* is not spoken about enough in the Church today. Part of the reason for this is widespread promotion of the Mosaic Law concept which teaches that disobedience to God results in fearful and eternal condemnation before Him (Exod. 23:20-33 [especially vv. 21 & 27]; Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4-5). And, many who profess Christianity apply these Law principles to the Church today. This results in both the fear of seeing oneself as inadequate to gain the acceptance of a Holy God and the fear of losing our relationship with God if we do not continue to be good enough for Him. In contrast, when we base our theology on the Grace of God as defined in the letters of Paul, both of these fears dissipate. For, this

truth explains how we are eternally established in the *Love of God* found in our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:31-39).

However, the *Fear of God* which does relate to Christians is centered on giving an account of our works done following salvation when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Scriptures considered in this article show the importance of why this concept of fearing the consequences of our sinful actions should change our lives. When believers grasp what the *Fear of God* involves, it will influence their lives by focusing them on how they are to personally live before God and not so much on how others are living. When we read in the Epistles about Christian living, motives, attitudes and thoughts; what is written the vast majority of the time is intended to make us look within ourselves. Our response ought to be: ‘How does my life compare with God’s revealed standards in His Word?’ (1 Cor. 2:13)

You will never, nor will I ever, obtain spirituality by judging or criticizing the actions of others. This is especially true when we pay attention to how unbelievers live, which seems to be the emphasis of a lot of Christians. In reality, non-Christians are not God’s children, He speaks of them as “free in relation to righteousness” and “the fear of God is not before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18; 6:20; Eph. 2:2). God does not expect unbelievers to obey His directives. And, He does not instruct us anywhere to require them to follow His moral standards (1 Cor. 5:10, 12).

They are not His children, we are. As such, what God wants from us is to first focus on our own personal godliness – putting off our old man and clothing ourselves with the characteristics of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Then, with wisdom and inspiration, we need to try to help our brothers and sisters in Christ by instructing them and encouraging them to also grow spiritually. Disciplining other believers is a necessary part of the Christian walk, but it should not be a practice which dominates the lives of God’s people.

God wants us to primarily focus on building up believers in order that all may progressively mature “to stand against the methods of the Devil” and to “live sensibly and righteously and godly in the present age” (Eph. 6:11; Tit. 2:12). We should continuously guide one another toward holding fast to our “head, Christ”. For, only from Him do we find adequate power enabling us to grow spiritually on a personal level. Also, He can direct us in an effective use of our gifts so we can contribute to “the growth of the body, resulting in the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).

If we desire to achieve the greatest impact for the Lord, each one of us should become serious about our behavior and live in a manner directly accountable for

our own actions before God, Himself. The principle of the *Fear of God*, when properly implemented, is an important ingredient designed by our Father to accomplish this goal. This healthy “fear” is a significant part of the God-given foundation upon which every Christian becomes individually conformed to the person of His Son and contributes his or her part to “the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13).

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Old Testament quotes are from the KJV.

New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek text.