Misconceptions About Withdrawal Of Fellowship – Part 1

INTRODUCTION:

1. It seems that whenever there is a situation where withdrawal must take place, there are misconceptions that are often expressed that can “muddy the water.”
	1. These misconceptions arise because some do not know what the word says about this subject, while other may misunderstand what it says on the subject.
	2. This is to be expected because some are new in the faith and have not had time to grow in knowledge in this area, while others may have not studied it as they should, or because it has not been addressed from the pulpit or in Bible class.
2. And, these misconceptions can be as varied as the people who express them.
3. It is important from time to time to address these misconceptions so that a correct view of withdrawal will be had and the action, when taken, will be more effective.

BODY:

1. **Misconception 1: “Withdrawal kicks one out of the church.”**

* 1. This misconception is encouraged by:

* + 1. The Catholic practice of “excommunication” which according to Canon law 1331 bars a rebellious member from their **rights of church membership**, including participating in communion and other “sacraments” provided by the Catholic church.

* + - 1. Forbidding **sacraments** from these brethren is believed to **withhold God’s grace** from them.
			2. So, they are barred from salvation that the church is believed to provide or dispense!
		1. It is also a result of a misunderstanding of Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 5.

* + - 1. Here Paul deals with a Christian being accepted despite having taken his father’s wife, whose sinful influence could spread in the church like leaven/yeast in dough.
			2. Paul says to clean out, get rid of, purge out this leaven, or sin, from among them (5:6-7, 13 – “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 **Clean out the old leaven** so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened… 13…Therefore “**put away** from yourselves the evil person.”).
				1. To clean out the sin requires that the one committing the sin be “put away.”
				2. How do you do that except to “kick them out of the church”?
	1. Although there is some truth in this idea, this is a misconception because…

* + 1. God’s never said to excommunicate them, barring them from the assemblies, communion, participation in singing, prayer, giving, etc.

* + - 1. We cannot bar the door, nor must we hire a bouncer to throw them out.
			2. On the contrary, the erring Christian willfully coming to the assemblies means they will be encouraged to repent (Heb. 10:24-25 – “and let us **consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds**, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”).
				1. In connection with the sinning Christian, the good work we must encourage is their repentance.
				2. This will not happen if we treat them like all is normal and do not address their sin.
				3. So, we have failed if they leave without knowing that they are still in sin and must repent or they will be lost.
		1. Withdrawal is not about restricting the actions of the erring Christian, but about restricting the faithful’s actions toward the erring Christian.

* + - 1. Withdrawal restricts the faithful from having social interaction with the erring Christian, not even to **eat** with them (1 Cor. 5:11 – “But actually, I wrote to you **not to associate with** any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—**not even to eat with such a one**.”).
			2. Yet, proper action toward the erring member **does not mean total disassociation** from them, seeing that admonishing them is required of us (2 Thess. 3:14-15 – “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, **take special note** of that person and **do not associate with him**, so that he will be **put to shame**. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, **but admonish him** as a brother.”).
		1. Withdrawal is not to restrict the erring Christian, but seeks to assure that the local church is kept pure (1 Cor. 5:6-7 – “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a **little leaven leavens the whole lump** of dough? 7 **Clean out the old leaven** so that you may be a **new lump**, just as you are in fact unleavened.”).

* + - 1. If a congregation allows sinful living in their members to continue without rebuke and withdrawal, it will cause that congregation to have a soft view of sin.
			2. This, of course, will lead to more sin and God’s condemnation of that church and the individuals tainted by that sin!
		1. So, withdrawal is not “excommunication” or “kicking one out of the church,” but a withholding of social interaction from the erring (eating, recreation, etc.) to keep the church pure and that they might be ashamed and repent.
1. **Misconception 2: Withdrawal ends one’s fellowship with God**

* 1. Some believe that when the local church withdrawals from someone, they are severed from the body of Christ and fellowship with God.
		1. Thus, withdrawal is said to affect that person’s salvation, their connection with God and the body.
			1. Ex: One person writing about the result of local church withdrawal said, “It also applies to the church universal. When one has been marked, **they have no fellowship with God**! If they have no fellowship with God, then they **have no fellowship with the church**.”
			2. This view assumes the erring brother/sister is in fellowship with God up until the time of the withdrawal, which then severs them from Christ’s body and fellowship with God.
			3. But, I believe, that is a misconception.
		2. This may come from a misunderstanding of Paul’s instruction to *deliver the erring Christian to Satan* (1 Cor. 5:3-5 – “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to **deliver this man to Satan** for the destruction of the flesh, **so that his spirit may be saved** in the day of the Lord.” – ESV).

* + - 1. To deliver someone to Satan says that they are not there yet.
			2. If one is delivered to Satan, he would naturally be “out of Christ,” or severed from Him.
			3. So, this idea has some truth in it, but not necessarily how we might think.
	1. This is a misconception because:

* + 1. Withdrawal is an ***acknowledgement*** of the erring Christian’s ***separation*** *from Christ*.

* + - 1. The local church delivers the erring Christian to Satan *because* that person has *already* separated him/herself from Christ, already Satan’s, already **lost**.
				1. This was to be done “so that his **spirit** may be **saved** in the day of the Lord” (5:5), not so his **spirit** would be **lost**, or severed from Christ.
				2. When one continues in sin without repentance, he/she has **already severed** themself from fellowship with God and spiritual fellowship with their brethren (1 John 1:6-7 – “If we say that we have **fellowship** with Him and yet **walk in the darkness**, we **lie** and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we **walk in the Light** as He Himself is in the Light, **we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”).
				3. Again, withdrawal only acknowledges what has already happened and seeks to address the erring Christian’s condition appropriately.
			2. *Delivering one to Satan* means that since that Christian is living like the *world*, living like he/she *is in Satan’s kingdom*, the faithful are to *acknowledge* that and give them over to that world to *experience* *again* what life is like for one who is *serving Satan!*
				1. It is important that everyone in the congregation be on board with this so that the sinner will know their sin has ended their fellowship with Christ and their brethren!
				2. When any member refuses to do this, it weakens the force of the action and helps ensure that the soul of the sinning Christian will be lost.
		1. That withdrawal severs one from God and Christ’s body is a misconception because **local church discipline is fallible**—it may be applied to the wrong person.

* + - 1. First century churches rejected some that were faithful members of Christ’s body:
				1. Jerusalem rejected Paul (Acts 9:26 – “When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.”).
				2. Diotrephes put faithful brethren out of the church (3 Jn. 9-10 – “I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and **puts them out of the church**.”).
			2. Other churches did not withdraw from those God had rejected (Rev. 2:20 – “But I have this against you, that you **tolerate** the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and **leads My bond-servants astray** so that they **commit acts of immorality** and eat things sacrificed to idols.”).
			3. Withdrawal did not change anything concerning these individual’s fellowship with God.
				1. That is determined by the individual’s heart and action, not the local church, seeing he Lord “knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19).
				2. Yet, local church withdrawal or lack of withdrawal can hurt a Christian’s spiritual condition.

Withdrawing from a faithful member could easily discourage that Christian and make their path to salvation more difficult.

Failing to withdraw from one who is sinning will hurt that individual spiritually because they will not be brought to shame for their sin as they should be so that they might repent.

* + - * 1. And, failing to withdraw from sinning brethren as God commands will harm the local church, allowing sin to gain a foothold in the lives of the members.

CONCLUSION:

1. There are other misconceptions I would like to address in another lesson, but until then I hope this has helped you to gain a better understanding the nature and purpose of withdrawal.
	1. I hope I have clearly and biblically shown that withdrawal is not…
		1. “Kicking someone out of the church,” or an act of excommunication.
		2. An act of severing one from Christ’s body and fellowship with God.
	2. Withdrawal is a/an…
		1. *Withholding of social interaction* from the erring member in hopes of saving their soul by gaining their repentance, while also keeping the local church pure by ending their sinful influence that unlimited social interaction would bring.
		2. *Acknowledgement of the erring Christians separation from Christ caused by their sin*, not the means of that separation, done in hopes that the erring member will be brought to shame and repentance by experiencing again what it is like to live in sin and service to Satan.
2. If you are a Christian, but have not lived faithfully, you need to consider that your fellowship with God has been put in jeopardy whether others know of this or now. So, will you come?
3. If you are not a Christian, why not come to Jesus today in F-R-C-B?