SABBATH THOUGHT 2026-08-29—SINS OF DISFELLOWSHIP

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

People who regularly attend with church organizations are considered to be members, at least from a corporate perspective. Whether Protestant, Catholic, Church of God, or otherwise, churches are business organizations that establish and maintain bylaws, legally own property, and install and pay local clergy. Part of their legal authority is the right to determine who attends their congregations. While membership does not always require a formal application, church organizations are fully within their legal rights to rescind the membership of someone and exclude them from further attendance. This is no different from the owner of a store. However, a church commonly refers to expulsion as disfellowship (it is both a noun and verb). Church organizations claim their authority from the following scriptures:

> ROMANS 16:17 Now I *[Paul]* urge you, brethren, **note those who cause divisions and offenses**, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, **and avoid them**.
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> 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6, 14 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly** and not according to the tradition which he received from us. … 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, **note that person and do not keep company with him**, that he may be ashamed.
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> MATTHEW 18:17 "And if he *[the offender]* refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the *ekkelsia*. But **if he refuses even to hear the *ekklesia*, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector**.
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> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9, 11-13 I *[Paul]* wrote to you in my epistle **not to keep company with sexually immoral people**. … 11 But now I have written to you **not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner–not even to eat with such a person**. 12 For what *have* I *to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore **"put away from yourselves the evil person."**

To "put away the evil from your midst" is from judgments in the Law of God that specify the punishments for various sins[1]. It applies to offenses because they are serious matters which come with a pronouncement of woes against an offender[2]. Scripture plainly recognizes a need to remove people who are disruptive, divisive, and offensive, but there is a clear process in the Bible that must be followed[3]:

1) The offender and victim must attempt to privately reconcile the offense even it the offense is against a minister. If necessary, two or three people can be brought in as witnesses:

[1] Deut. 13:6; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22:24; 24:7.
[2] Matt. 18:7.
[3] Refer to the booklet Offenses—Ordnances Of God.

MATTHEW 18:15-16 "Moreover **if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone**. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of **two or three witnesses** every word may be established.'

2) Offenses that cannot be reconciled privately are brought to the *ekklesia*, which includes all who are baptized, not just the clergy. Some of them are tasked with hearing the testimony of both the offender and victim and two or three witnesses. Only those who have demonstrated an ability to make equitable and fair judgments are chosen from the local congregation to judge the matter.

MATTHEW 18:17 "And if he *[the offender]* refuses to hear them *[the witnesses]*, **tell *it* to the *ekkelsia***.

EXODUS 18:21-22 "Moreover you shall **select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness**; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 "And **let them judge the people** at all times. …

1 CORINTHIANS 6:4-5 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, **do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the *ekklesia* to judge**? 5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not **a wise man among you**, not even one, **who will be able to judge between his brethren**?

3) Those who judge the matter must understand justice cannot prevail when there is anger or desires for vengeance. This is a legal process under the Law of God for the PURPOSE of: 1) putting away evil from among the *ekklesia* and, 2) restoring someone who has sinned:

2 THESSALONIANS 3:15 Yet **do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother**.

ROMANS 12:19 Beloved, **do not avenge yourselves**, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, **"Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.**

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1, 5 It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles– that a man has his father's wife! … 5 **deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved** in the day of the Lord Jesus.

4) Whatever the judgment, it must be rendered by a consensus of the majority, as in the case of the Corinthian who was having relations with his "father's wife"[4]:

2 CORINTHIANS 2:6 **This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority** …

5) Finally, the matter must be kept private[5] except when someone may help with resolving the offense or when people might be put at risk:

[4] 1 Cor. 5:2.
[5] Also Lev. 19:16; Ps. 41:7; Prov. 17:9; Matt. 12:35; Luke 6:45; Eph. 4:29; 1 Tim. 5:12-13; et al.

> 1 TIMOTHY 5:13 And besides they learn *to be* idle, **wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips *[excessive talkers]* and busybodies *[meddlesome]*, saying things which they ought not**.

But the process typically followed in church organizations does not even resemble the biblical one. It is always a minister who determines if an offense or sin has been committed; often it is the minister who makes the accusation. He also decides guilt or innocence and orders the disfellowship. All of this is usually done without consulting others. But even when others are involved, they are either under the authority of the minister or trusted associates or both. The last act is the minister will publicly denounce to every congregation the name of the person along with details of the transgression. This is nothing more than an act of vengeance. It also stirs people up to ensure the vast majority will willingly turn against the person and side with the minister. All of this completely contradicts with the Law of God and is a blatant disregard for justice:

1) Instead of privately attempting to reconcile, the minister makes it a public spectacle.
2) Instead of bringing the offense to some the *ekklesia*, he alone directs the course of events and his actions ensure reconciliation can never happen.
3) Instead of hearing testimony from the offender and two or three witnesses, the only side anyone hears and knows is the minister's.
4) Instead of judging according to the Law of God, it is a judgment based upon anger and a desire for vengeance.
5) Instead of regarding the offender as a brother or sister in Christ, the offender is painted as an enemy.
6) Instead of desire to restore someone from sins, the offender is shamed with demands of a public repentance.
7) Instead of a decision by a majority of the *ekklesia*, the minister alone decides it.

While churches have a legal right to exclude someone from their organization, that is completely different from the broad disfellowship that involves the entire congregation and encompasses their private lives. Disfellowship is a matter of authority and control for church organizations. A minister can revoke someone's membership because it is their legal right to do so; however, he deceitfully labels it a disfellowship so he can force the congregation to ostracize the person. He does NOT have a legal right to do that but those who refuse will be threatened with disfellowship themselves.

Paul himself never disfellowshipped anyone and he was clear that this is a responsibility of the brethren (the *ekklesia*). A member of the clergy could be involved but he is not inherently authorized to decide every case of disfellowship simply because he is ordained. Nor can he claim he has that authority because an offense occurred among members of his congregation.

The main reason disfellowship must be decided by the *ekklesia* is it affects them the most. They must make the hard decision to sever a relationship with someone in the Body of Christ. This affects family, friends, and brethren more than a minister.

That is also why disfellowshipping someone must be decided only when there is substantiated evidence that someone refuses to reconcile an offense or there are sins of rebellion. Most of the time, the majority of the *ekklesia* are never even aware of the situation and, yet, they are ordered to sever their relationship with someone without hearing both sides. The responsibility for deciding disfellowship must belong to the *ekklesia*, not the clergy or church organization.

Justice under the Law of God REQUIRES hearing both sides of the story and establishing the facts and evidence by the testimony of witnesses[6]:

> LEVITICUS 19:15 **You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In [justice] you shall judge your neighbor.**
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> DEUTERONOMY 19:15 "**One witness *[or accuser]* shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established**.

The process used by church organizations to disfellowship someone "add[s] sin to sin."[7] Not only does it violate the Law of God, it can cause members to sin. How? Those who submit to the demands of a minister to sever all contact someone will many times be provoked unto anger toward the person simply because the minister was angry. That is a sin of hating someone without a cause:

> PSALMS 35:19-21 Let them not rejoice over me **who are wrongfully my enemies**; Nor let them wink with the eye **who hate me without a cause**. 20 For they do not speak peace, but **they devise deceitful matters against *the* quiet ones** in the land. 21 They also opened their mouth wide against me, *and* said, "**Aha, aha! Our eyes have seen *it.***"

This verse accurately describes the consequences when church organizations disfellowship someone. They make enemies of brethren, stir up hate, and deceitfully judge matters. People often end up biased against someone they never knew or ever met. The manner in which church organizations disfellowship people is certainly a sin upon the minister and sometimes the members as well.

Over the decades, I realized that many who were disfellowshipped were indeed innocent. There was a lady who asked a minister a question about his teaching that seemed to contradict Scripture. At least one person sought help from a minister and revealed a personal sin in confidence but was kicked out instead. People have been disfellowshipped because they went to a picnic with brethren in other organizations. Women can put themselves at risk if they have a Bible Study or prayer group without an authorized male Overseer.

Admittedly, not all who are disfellowshipped are innocent. However, oftentimes the offense is not as serious as it was made out to be and the real problem was people

[6] Also Deut. 17:17.
[7] Isa. 30:1.

refusing to reconcile. In my experience, it is rare that someone is disfellowshipped for serious offenses. For example, years ago I was threatened by a 'baptized' man who always brought a knife to services hidden under his shirt. He was upset because I closed the window blinds so the hot sun was not on me. I later found out he had gone to someone's place of employment and made similar threats. He was never disfellowshipped. The reason? He was a racial minority … just like the minister. In another case, a minister refused to inform the ladies of the congregation that a man who was dating some of them had been recently released from prison for murdering his wife.

All of this came to mind because I recently received emails from someone who was once a friend. My email address was inserted accidentally for someone else with the same first name. Years ago when I was disfellowshipped, this man decided his loyalty had to reside with the organization rather than with a friend. There was nothing untoward in the emails and I suspect they have completely forgotten about our friendship. But it reminded me of all the lost friendships—those I severed because a church organization demanded it and those I lost when others followed along with the church demands.

Church organizations have done so much damage over the years. Losing a relationship simply because a minister orders it is one of the saddest things to encounter in the Body of CHRIST! Not only have these men destroyed families and friendships but they have instilled futility and distrust in the *ekklesia*. How? The demands of absolute obedience required by churches mean that friendships only exist as long as people are obedient and loyal to the minister and organization. Fear of disfellowship is a clear warning never to cause offense, especially with the minister. The worst part is that once someone leaves, they are forgotten:

> MATTHEW 18:12-14 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and **one of them goes astray**, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to **seek the one that is straying**? 13 "And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, **he rejoices more over that *sheep*** than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 "Even so **it is not the will of your Father** who is in heaven **that one of these little ones should perish**.

The unspoken reality is "once disfellowshipped, always disfellowshipped." The saddest part is the loss of family and friends because church organizations never preach this from the Bible about disfellowship either:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 2:7-8 … **you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him.**

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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