

**Communicating
As
Christians**

The Prevention of Gossip

*A Manual
For Church Members*

Contents

I. Guidelines for Communicating, Restoring, and Motivating.....	
A. Being the Right Person in Communications.....	
B. Restoring and Seeking Change in Another Person.....	
C. Conclusion.....	
II. Gossip - Satan's Scourge Against the Church (What it is and ways to handle it).....	
A. All Communication Should Add To and Enhance	
B. All Public Communication About Another Should Be a Good Report.....	
C. The Procedure for Handling Offense.....	
D. If a Person Concerned About Another Person's Actions Fails to Use God's Procedures.....	
E. Never Receive Gossip.....	
F. Gossip is an Evil Procedure . . . No Matter What the Intent.....	
G. All Reports of a Potentially Serious Nature Must Be Processed According to God's Word	
H. Conclusion.....	
III. The Bible Basis for Church Discipline.....	
IV. A Clear Conscience, Discernment, and Success.....	
A. God's Spirit and a Clear Conscience.....	
B. Our Own Spirit, Mind and Body.....	
C. Our Communications with Others and a Clear Conscience.....	
V. Deeper Understanding of the Cancer of Carelessness in Communications.....	
A. The Body - The Head of the Body.....	
B. We Have a Mandate from God.....	
C. Who Defiles Through Communication?.....	
D. What is the Problem?.....	
E. How to Identify Evil Communications.....	
(Includes understanding the consequences of compromise - from typical case histories of problem-plagued churches)	
F. How to Screen Out and Avoid Defilement by Gossips and Quiet Their Evil Ways for the Protection of the Church.....	
G. Identifying the Problem of Defilement in One's Self.....	
H. Conquering Sin in Communications.....	
Summary.....	

Introduction

The church is built by God with people on the basis of a confession, a conversion, and a confidence (Matt. 16:16-18). The confession, the foundation, the solid rock is “thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Scripture describes the church as a body (Eph. 1:22, 23); a bride (Eph. 5:22-32); and a building (Eph. 2:20-22) - each having members with different functions needed to support the whole in its mission. Membership in a church means we will be closely associated with other members of God’s family.

Much of the teaching in the epistles of the New Testament concerns the relationship of Christians with fellow Christians. The stress of the personal relationships between Christians is because the church is a New Testament community. One of the things that impressed the first-century world with the church was the members’ love toward one another. They were a testimony to something dynamic and much better than what the world had to offer. A church which is obedient to God will demonstrate God’s POWER FOR A HARMONIOUS FELLOWSHIP to the community and to the world.

ALL OUR PREACHING OF FAITH WILL NOT CONVINCING THE WORLD OF THE LOVE AND FORGIVENESS OF GOD IF NOT EXHIBITED IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH. THE SCOURGE FROM COMMUNICATING OUTSIDE GOD’S PROTECTIVE DOCTRINE IS A SERIOUS BLEMISH OVER OUR WITNESS - A MAJOR CRISIS IN CHURCHES TODAY! COMMUNICATION IS NOT JUST A MEANS TO AN END. IT IS AN END IN ITSELF. THE ULTIMATE AIM FOR THE CHRISTIAN IS TO PLEASE GOD THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS GIFT OF LOVE AND THE PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN OUR DAILY WALK. WE GLORIFY GOD OR WE DO SATAN’S WORK BY THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE!!

Our relationship with God (vertical) must be right. Being a Christian also means that my relationship with others (horizontal) has to be made right (Mark 12:30,31; Luke 10:27). Am I in the process of loving my neighbor as myself? A key to acceptance of this principle in my relationship of love and not being judgmental toward others is to understand God’s love and forgiveness for me! Oh wretched sinner that I AM - saved from an eternity in Hell by the blood of Christ.

Security of the believer is not a license to sow discord and defile the temple. **WE MUST BRING CLOSELY INTO OUR TEACHING AND PRACTICE THE BIBLE DOCTRINE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND DISCIPLINE! THERE SHOULD BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING IN OUR CHURCHES AS TO WHAT GOD’S STANDARDS ARE; AND THERE SHOULD BE NO HESITANCY IN APPLYING GOD’S PROCEDURE (Matthew 18) TO REBELS WHO ARE UNREPENTANT AND GIVEN OVER TO THE OLD NATURE.** One church member doing Satan’s work (Rev. 12:10b) can undo all the work and prayers that other Christians have accomplished over years of dedicated service.

Church debt in relation to giving (tithe) has a bearing upon discipline and the spiritual health of the church. The freedom to discipline wayward members should not be compromised by excessive debt and the fear of lost revenue. This then becomes the basis

for control by rebels who can operate and gossip without fear of removal. Failure to discipline and preserve the purity of the church for any reason, including the FEAR of lost revenues, UNDERMINES the church at its very core! The benefit of a beautiful edifice (church and parsonage) is shallow in comparison to the testimony of the church members in their behavior toward one another and their adherence to Bible doctrine. Keeping church debt at a level where discipline can be exercised and the loss of revenue will not cause financial collapse is important.

Communication problems (pride and perception) came with the fall of man. Studies suggest that only 7% of an idea is communicated totally by the words we use. Approximately 38% of perception is believed to be a product of the inference on words from voice inflection, pitch and tone; 55% facial and body expression, dress, and appearance. The way we dress, what we eat and where we seek our entertainment are influential in communications.

How we describe an idea we wish to communicate to another is the product of our experiences and prejudices and, to an extent, human misconception. A husband and wife can live together for fifty years, making their backgrounds about as similar as they could be for that length of time. Still, they are not always sending and receiving the same message. What does the receiver of our message perceive from what we say? He or she is from a different set of experiences, human prejudices and misconceptions. Because of this, the sender and receiver of a message can have a serious problem, sometimes not even knowing that it exists. MISUNDERSTANDING WHAT ANOTHER INTENDED IS A VERY SIGNIFICANT CAUSE OF PROBLEMS BETWEEN PEOPLE.

We are in a fight against sin and in direct opposition to Satan. John 8:44 describes Satan as “a liar and the father of it.” Satan’s gospel is pride, humanism, carnality, wickedness and infidelity to God’s authority. In Revelation 12:9, Satan is clearly exposed as the deceiver of the whole world. In communications, the tragedy of this universe is the subject of Jesus’ prayer in John 17:25, “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee...” Satan’s biggest crime has been to deceive the world about the faultless reputation of our perfect God. COMMUNICATING SIMPLY MUST BE DONE GOD’S WAY ACCORDING TO GOD’S BLUEPRINT!

This booklet includes a partial list of scripture and commentary of God’s standards for communicating and discipline. “Communicating as Christians” is intended to be used with the “Congregational Harmony” booklet and “The Laymen’s Letter.” All church members should be familiar with the Bible doctrine for church discipline and communications. A thorough review in new-member classes as well as periodically from the pulpit or mid-week Bible study is suggested.

This booklet is dedicated to the strengthening of our churches, our families, and the nation for the glory of God.

Chapter I

Guidelines for Communicating, Restoring, and Motivating

In communications we are not to gloss over sin and faulty performance, but we are to emphasize the good qualities which exist and build on the qualities that come from God. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). Placing our emphasis with others on the negative does not work unless, of course, we want to break off communications. They are condemned already, and it is a sore spot; so they just avoid people who constantly dwell on the bad. We are to build them up and help them want to seek a new and better way (Heb. 10:24,25,30). We are to communicate “. . . that which is good to the use of edifying.”

If we do not use wisdom in communicating fault, people can easily miss the point we intended for their benefit. “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matt. 18:15). Even Job who “eschewed evil” and was called by God an “upright man” was offended by his friends. He got side-tracked and missed the truth about his error with God. Job’s friends were careless in the way they communicated., and if we are careless we will fail. We hate sin; we point out bad performance, but we should love the sinner. If we come down on people in personal condemnation, they are distracted or offended and will not get the point. We are to show them what they can be in Christ (John 15:8). To do this, we must communicate; we must be the right person (Eph. 4:22-32).

A. BEING THE RIGHT PERSON IN COMMUNICATIONS

1. Your interest in people must be genuine! “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven” (Matt. 5:16). It is not giving them what we have, it is patiently giving of our time to show them what they can be with God’s help. Generally, people are not interested in others. They are interested in themselves and their own problems. People like a person who shows a genuine interest in them. The accent in our voice, the smile, the warm handshake speak louder about how we feel about people than do words. The way we see people is the way we treat them, and the way we treat them is the way they may become (Titus 3:2,3).

2. Be a good listener. “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them” (Prov. 20:12). “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9); “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). People have a built-in need to be heard. We should avoid competing activities while listening. Look them in the eye and listen to what is being said. Sometimes repeat a portion of what is said so they will know they got through. To fail to speak to a person is worse than being negative; it implies they are a non-person. It is important we acknowledge and show our love by speaking to others, including children and older people.

3. Arouse their desire to reach goals; be cheerful and optimistic. “But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ...” (Heb. 3:13,14). The Apostle Paul showed enthusiasm about the future. This is important. Many people lack enthusiasm and need to be motivated in order to accomplish anything. They drift along without curiosity or excitement, seeing no challenges or adventures. We learn to be interested in the world around us. An enthusiastic leader will spark this learning. We do not gather honey by swatting the bees. Sincerely praise the other person’s good qualities in order to help him to be eager and want to improve. Praise even the slightest improvement and get him started. Although people must learn that pleasing God is more than sufficient as a reward, they must get started and learn - show enthusiasm!

4. Dependability is critical. Be a good example. Out communications become meaningless and our effectiveness as a leader is destroyed by our lack of dependability as a person. We are in the people-business for God. Our power for God as a leader is destroyed if our goals for God and our example are running in opposite directions. Keeping a written record of agreements made is a good idea because it is too easy to forget. We should only make commitments we are sure we can keep. Avoid flippant talk and words which a leader might later regret. When we do make a mistake, admit it. Have a clear conscience with God and others. (See Chapter IV)

Be known as one who does not tolerate gossip in self or in those under his authority. Develop a procedure for having the gossip face his sin in Biblical repentance. (See Chapter V, E and F)

Be an example to the people we wish to motivate. Being a good example begins in the home. The Apostle Paul said, “Follow me as you see me following Christ.” In other words, our honesty, spontaneous happiness, and ability to meet the problems of life, stabilized by the indwelling Christ, provide a strong example. Through example, consistently lived in the daily give-and-take of life, Christian principles are successfully taught. The Bible uses examples - authentic people who lived exemplary lives.

5. The key to being the right person is to be in a daily program of Bible study, prayer, and self-examination. To be victorious over pride, temptations, and Satan’s counterfeits requires the power and wisdom of God (James 1:2-5). We cannot succeed without the grace of God, and so daily Bible study and prayer are very important. It is by grace we discern good from evil and desire to do God’s will. God’s grace is the power that “...bringeth salvation...” and it teaches how to live “righteously” (Titus 2:11,12). “...I laboured more abundantly...yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (I Cor. 15:10). The only way we will get grace is by being humble. “...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6).

“...if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord...” (I Cor. 11:31,32). What are my blind spots, motives, and attitudes? Do I reflect the Holy Spirit or the vanity of the world? Am I the judge of others or does God have a right to purposes for others that I do not understand? Am I an accuser of the brethren? Do I criticize their family, their life, their service, their ministry? IF SO, SATAN NEED GO NO FURTHER! I am doing Satan’s work. Satan is “the accuser of

our brethren...” (Rev. 12:10). What has this done to my personality? What has this done to the attitude of my children, my spouse? Beyond wronging them, to whom else must I confess - missionaries, lay men and women, the pastor, many pastors? I have grieved God! God alone has the right to judge! Help me, Lord. Clean up my wicked mind and quiet my tongue. Help me to turn my grief to joy.

“Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish” (Prov. 12:1). The safety valve of a forthright but loving wife, employee, deacon, etc. who will come in private and alert us to our blind spots or our program that has gone astray are a blessing from God. It has certainly been true in the life of this writer. “...we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (I John 3:22).

B. RESTORING AND SEEKING CHANGE IN ANOTHER PERSON

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted: (Gal. 6:1). The following are scriptural ways of helping people see a fault and then want to improve (Gal. 5:13-16). Negative communications with a person begin with the individual personally (Matt. 18:15).

1. Precede finding fault with an honest compliment. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). Say something good about the performer, then call attention to the problem with the performance. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity. I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (I Cor. 13:1).

2. Precede the mention of their mistake with an example of a mistake you made. “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Luke 6:41, 42a). When we talk about our own mistakes before criticizing another person’s performance, he sees it as a sharing in loving concern, not bossing, and communications remain open.

3. Ask questions that would obviously lead them to the correct conclusion and then reinforce the right answer to the question with a positive example. “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (I Thess. 5:21). Help them think a problem through. They will not be embarrassed, but appreciate your counsel.

4. Encourage them, and let them know the problem or fault cannot only be overcome, but it can be overcome easier than they expect. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). If we magnify the problem, if we imply they are incapable and the situation is hopeless, we destroy their incentive to improve and succeed. It is far better to let them know we have faith in them and their walk with God and that the problem, with God’s help, is surmountable.

A leader must focus on objectives, not obstacles. Seeing the shipwreck inevitable, the Apostle Paul urged the men to be of good cheer because though the ship would be

destroyed, they would all live. He encouraged them to calm down. That was just what those men needed to hear.

CONCLUSION

As born-again Christians, we must be careful that the salt does not lose its savor, that our light is not hidden (Col. 4:6). In a world of storms, death, disease, lying and prejudice, our knowing and communicating the truth in love is not only a duty, it is an opportunity to glorify God. We are in privileged positions to succeed for Him.

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:3-8).

“...if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord...” (I Cor. 11: 31,32). What are my blind spots, motives, and attitudes? Do I reflect the Holy Spirit or the vanity of the world? Am I the judge of others or does God have a right to purposes for others that I do not understand? Am I an accuser of the brethren? Do I criticize their family, their life, their service, their ministry? **IF SO, SATAN NEED GO NO FURTHER!** I am doing Satan’s work. Satan is “...the accuser of our brethren...” (Rev. 12:10).

Chapter II **Gossip - Satan’s s Scourge Against the Church** **(What It Is and Ways to Handle It)**

The tinder box for Satan’s scourge is the wrong placement, the public placement of a detrimental report (accusation) about another (Rev. 12:10b). “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity...it defileth the whole body...and it is set on fire of hell” (Js. 3:6). Gossip is communicating publicly a detrimental viewpoint about a person to others, other than the one whose conduct is in question. Perhaps no other avenue of Satan’s vengeance is left so unattended by church discipline.

Gossip is a rebellious practice, and a **VIOLATION OF BIBLE DOCTRINE**. “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. 19:15). “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses” (I Tim. 5:19). “If any man (woman) ...seem to be religious, and bridled not his (her) tongue...this man’s (woman’s) religion is in vain” (Js. 1:26).

A. All communication should add to and enhance God’s reputation. “...bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Ps. 34:1); “...let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him” (Ps. 33:8); “...do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto man” (Col. 3:23).

B. All public communication about another should be a good report unless we have FIRST followed Matthew 18 in a spirit of restoring rather than exposing (Gal. 6:1). Even when the need for discipline is established through this Bible procedure, exposure is to be limited to those affected and not to be the subject of gossip. Gossip is an inexcusable concert with Satan and a total rejection of the communication safety net Christ so dearly paid for at the Cross. “...whatsoever things are...lovely..of good report...if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8); “...for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Lk. 6:45); “Keep thy tongue from evil...” (Ps. 34:13); “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in work, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity: (I Tim. 4:12); “The face of the Lord is against them that do evil...” (Ps. 34:16).

A bad report (Satan’s fire) can be about dress, speech, morals, habits, manners or whatever. For example, comments to anyone other than the pastor criticizing his sermon or dress; judgmental utterances by a church member in the absence of a person criticizing his family or the way he does things are direct violations of Bible doctrine (Prov. 16:28). This is no less a sin than witchcraft or a person orchestrating attitude over others who are willing to receive gossip! “...to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (I Tim. 4:1).

C. The procedure for handling offenses as gossip, other doctrinal deviations, immorality, and an irreconcilable spirit has four phases - each to be considered in an atmosphere of prayer and selflessness. It is not man but God Who has the power to solve problems which disrupt the church. The process must be conducted not only according to the Matthew 18 sequence, but in the power of God’s Spirit. Prayer is very essential! While we are not to allow serious offenses to continue without correction (I Cor. 5), there must be a yieldedness to God’s Spirit when following Matthew 18 that can only come through earnest prayer. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

*FIRST: the report of a wrong never being made public (per A & B above) where Satan tilleth the fire should, if endangering the witness for Christ, be presented humbly to the offender in private. “MOREOVER IF THY BROTHER SHALL TRESPASS AGAINST THEE, GO AND TELL HIM HIS FAULT BETWEEN THEE AND HIM ALONE: IF HE SHALL HEAR THEE, THOU HAST GAINED THY BROTHER” (Matt. 18:15).

Denying one of God’s children the right to be told privately, in person, and in love (with a helpful attitude) about a progress-lingering practice is blasphemy against God. Private (not public) and loving communications are something we all need one hundred times over. This loyalty honors God and shields the church from the Satanic terrorism of

gossip. This is God's way for us to grow as a team and as individuals. In contrast to the hellish environment of gossip with its destabilization of the church. God would give us a peaceful and loving environment. As individuals, in private (not public), we help one another. Individuals help the pastor. The pastor helps individuals, and individual members help other members. In love our blind spots and evil are confronted, and in love we grow as a team to be more like Christ.

If something needs to be said publicly, God says to find something good to say! "Put them in mind... to speak evil of no man... but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived,... living in malice and envy (and) hateful... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. 3:1-3, 5,6).

Just as the offended party is to approach the offender in meekness, the offender is to respond in the power of God's Spirit (graciously - II Cor. 1:12). We are always to be alert to the possibility we have offended others. When told or when we sense that another feels badly toward us, we are to seek him out and see if there is an offense to be cleared up. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23,24); "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). The fact we did not realize we had offended another does not release us from accountability (I Cor. 13:4-7). We are to express SORROW to the person we have offended and seek forgiveness for the hurt we have caused. "...Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the might hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (I Pet. 5:5-6).

If we deliberately hurt a person in his presence or behind his back, as with gossip, much worse is the sin upon one's soul. "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11); "...for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord hath pronounced..." (Jer. 36:7); "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool. An evil man seeketh only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him" (Prov. 17:10,11).

We are to have a clear conscience before God and our fellow man when taking communion: "...Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (I Cor. 11:24,25,27). Our conscience is cleared when we have repented and sought the forgiveness of those we have sinned against. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (die prematurely)" (I Cor. 11:29,30). "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

***SECOND:** if unresolved (the offender rejects you) and the reputation of God (His children) still appears to be in danger, then proceed from Matthew 18:15 to God's Grand Jury procedure "BUT IF HE WILL NOT HEAR THEE, THEN TAKE WITH THEE ONE OR TWO MORE, THAT IN THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD MAY BE ESTABLISHED" (Matt. 18:16).

When approached by a party who wants to share an allegation against another, it is important to be sure the one offended has conscientiously tried to resolve the problem in private with the offender according to Matthew 18:15. Refuse to hear a dispute in the absence of the one charged! To do so is sin (being a party to gossip). Get the two together. Not only must we refuse to be a part of Matthew 18:16 until Matthew 18:15 is carried out, but we have a duty to counsel the offended party on the seriousness of gossip and the importance of following Matthew 18 in sequence or dropping the matter forever!! **THE DUTY FOR THIS LIES UPON EVERY MEMBER OF THE CHURCH EQUALLY:** it is not a duty reserved for the pastor or deacons.

There should be no toleration of an individual handling the reputation of another of Christ's bought ones with detrimental utterances. The authenticity and seriousness of the allegation **MUST** first be established by witnesses who are spiritual (Gal. 6:1). Those selected to witness (hear) the offended party should be impartial in their feeling toward both parties. They should not be closely related or otherwise connected so as to compromise their spirituality (seeing things from God's perspective).

Deacons should understand the vulnerability of any human being in the pastor's job. It is usually better that deacons (selected for their impartiality) handle Matthew 18 problems which come to the church for resolution. Deacons, under pastoral guidance, can serve the church in this very significant way, helping to preserve its testimony. Matthew 18 adjustments, which may be needed, may cause problem parties to be bitter and want to spread the problem to others. Deacons are easier to replace, come the next church election, and it is much better to have those being disciplined upset with the deacons rather than with the pastor (see Congregational Harmony, Chapter IV).

***THIRD:** "AND IF HE SHALL NEGLECT TO HEAR THEM, TELL IT UNTO THE CHURCH..." (Matt. 18:17a).

It is very important that this meeting be moderated in an orderly manner. The people should know what the ground rules are in advance. The accused has the right to be confronted by his accuser according to Matthew 18:15,16 before public charges are made. Only persons who have sought restoration **PERSONALLY** through Matthew 18:15,16 and failed are permitted by God's Word to make an accusation (speak) against a brother before the congregation. All members in attendance are, however, free to vote if a vote is taken. They are admonished by God's Word to vote according to the leading of **HIS SPIRIT**, removing from one's own spirit the evil of self-righteousness. All that is needed or **DESIRABLE** for voting God's Word on the matter, testimony of the parties and witnesses in the Matthew 18:15,16 sequence, and a prayerful search to know the will of God!

NO ONE'S REPUTATION, INCLUDING OUR FAULTLESS GOD'S, CAN WITHSTAND A CHRISTIAN'S ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ANOTHER WHICH HAVE

NOT BEEN SCREENED ACCORDING TO GOD'S MANDATE (BY MATTHEW 18:15,16). The scriptural head of the home is to be the family spokesman (I Cor. 14:33). All deliberations preceding a disciplinary decision or a vote of confidence are to be addressed in a spirit of love and meekness. Confession, repentance, self-discipline and restoration are the goals.

The time for a meeting with the church or a small group delegated and authorized to hear and dispose of a matter should be reasonable so the parties to the dispute have no excuse for being absent. Both parties - the one who made the charge and the one who is to give an accounting - have an obligation to cooperate in disposing of the matter. If they fail, after reasonable notice, to appear as summoned and make an accounting they have rejected the jurisdiction of the church. This act is known technically contumacy. Failure to appear as summoned is a display of contempt for the church and its right to control matters which bear upon its testimony and operation. A person who rejects the Matthew 18 sequence and the jurisdiction of the church should normally be divested of membership privileges for a short time and if there is no repentance removed from church membership. When Bible doctrine has been rejected and the indispensable "continuance" (Romans 2:7) within the church disregarded, the alternative is to be delivered (Matt. 18:17b; I Cor. 5:5). *FOURTH: "...BUT IF HE NEGLECT TO HEAR THE CHURCH, LET HIM BE UNTO THEE AS AN HEATHEN MAN AND A PUBLICAN. VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, WHATSOEVER YE SHALL BIND ON EARTH SHALL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN: AND WHATSOEVER YE SHALL LOOSE ON EARTH SHALL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN" (MATT. 18:17B, 18).

D. If a person concerned about another's actions fails to use God's procedure and gossips, then he or she has committed an offense against God and the church. This calls for exposure in private according to Matthew 18:15. If he or she does not respond in self-judgment and repentance, then proceed according to Matthew 18:16,17.

E. Never receive gossip. "But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned" (Heb. 6:8). Failure to reject gossip in the presence of the gossip and remove one's self, if necessary, from conversation has three very serious consequences.

1. You become guilty of conspiring through passivity by accepting Satan's method for destroying the church's witness and God's reputation.

Webster's definition of conspiracy: "Partner, concurrence, indiscretion, giving over to the enemy." Webster's definition of a gossip: "to act as a familiar friend or companion in the conveyance of reports of a personal nature." "...but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34); "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:22); "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I Jn. 2:15).

2. You expose your soul (mind) to the fire of a wicked tongue which is comparable to witchcraft where evil seemeth good. "But let a man examine himself...For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many

are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (I Cor. 11:28-31). It is clear that those who refuse obedience to God (to condemn and discontinue gossiping) bring sickness upon themselves. Many sicknesses start slowly (soul, then to body) and take years to remove offenders from the scene. Thus, they will continue to do great harm to the church’s witness for God if not confronted and controlled promptly!

Gossip is an allurements of Satan, harmful to your soul, and NEVER A RELIABLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION. “...the tongue...setteth on fire the course of nature...” (James 3:6); “...for Satan himself (grandeur to those living outside of God’s Word) is transformed into an angel of light” (II Cor. 11:14); “And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (II Per. 2:2,3); “...your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you...” (Is. 59:2).

3. Accepting gossip is a great sin against God because you are listening to the opinion of one who is usurping authority for judgment reserved by God. Gossip is a rebellion against God’s authority. “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness (against God’s doctrine) is as iniquity and idolatry...” (I Sam. 15:23); “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34); “Obey them that have the rule (God-given authority in the church or family to guide) over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls...” (Heb. 13:17); “Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations...professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:21,22).

F. Gossip is an evil procedure which fuels Satan’s scourge no matter what the intent or the motive. It may occur because of judgmentalism, leading to a desire for revenge, or to undercut and destroy authority; it may occur because of ignorance of God’s doctrine for detrimental communication.

We are to seek the leading of God’s Spirit to discern His will in the matter of voting on church officers. We are not to go out taking a survey, gossiping to the church people along the way. Gossip is a terror to good, an attack by one who has no right to pass judgment. If gossip comes from an attitude of judgmentalism, an offense is committed in addition to gossip.

These people believe they are right in their judgment, but they never are totally correct because of the imbalance of their deceptive hearts. They become assassins (in public) of the character and personal reputation of God’s child, God the Father, and His church. This combination of GOSSIP and CHARACTER ASSASSINATION calls for two different confessions for self-judgment and, if not forthcoming, church discipline.

G. All reports of a potentially serious nature must be processed and dealt with

according to God's Word (Matt. 18). The reports must not be ignored, whether from a gossip or from proper channels. God's reputation, the reputation of the church workers, and the church's witness are at stake. Failure to clear the innocent and discipline the unrepentant members will add one more very damaging effect. The gossip will use this failure as an excuse to fuel Satan's fire with more gossip. **THE TRUTH IS, GOSSIPS DESTABILIZE THE CHURCH AND THEY ARE RUINING OUR CHURCHES WHEN NOT CONTROLLED OR REMOVED.**

CONCLUSION

Gossipers do not see the consequences of their sin. They believe that they are doing is acceptable to God and the church. They will continue to gossip and serve Satan in the ravage of the church if they are not prayerfully confronted in person according to Matthew 18.

For the sake of God's reputation, the pastor, and the workers in the church, gossiping must, and we repeat, must be confronted. What we are saying here is the evil of gossiping as a procedure for communicating must be corrected or removed. If the gossiper rejects self-judgment and confession, then some church people or the church as a whole must know of the evil (Matt. 18:17).

Though less desirable than a willing confession and repentance by the gossiper within the privacy of those exposed, the broad exposure at the church level is much, much better than gossip unchallenged. This is the last resort in correcting Satan's scourging of the church. **GOD KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE THIS CURSE IN COMMUNICATIONS.** The practice of one unilaterally making bad reports in public about another must be dealt with firmly according to God's Word! Even with our limited understanding of God's ways, four advantages of the Matthew 18 doctrine are apparent.

A. Advantage over Satan of a review of the offense and a review in privacy where Satan cannot stir the fire.

When subjected to Matthew 18:15,16 most offenses are found to be misunderstandings- innocent, unintended, or petty. These are diffused in privacy, denying Satan the fodder for ravaging the church and God's reputation.

We have no right to condemn another in the privacy of our own minds, let alone gossip. In fact, we have a duty to respect differences in others. Their God is your God and He has a right to give them different parents, different backgrounds, and different personalities. Communications must be conducted in accordance with God's Word, not the corruption of Satan, the godlessness of humanism or the politics of carnality!

B. Logistical advantage over Satan.

When Bible doctrine for control of gossip is followed, the church confronts the sin and **REJECTS IT AS A STANDARD OF PRACTICE.** This is in contrast to Satan's method where the gossiper stands in the public eye as superior to God's church, and the church is seen as condoning the gossip and the offense in another which the gossip alleges.

Failure to control gossip allows Satan to get an upper hand inside the church. Application of the Matthew 18 doctrine by Christians allows for the restoration of the repentant offender and the discipline or the removal of the unrepentant. It sets the record straight for the church's testimony. It is not possible to thoroughly retrieve the damage of the gossip to its victims; the Matthew 18 procedure restores the reputation of the innocent in part.

C. Advantage of bringing gossips into correction or removed from church membership: closes a most potent avenue for Satan to scourge the church.

This denies Satan the luxury of having a pirate within the church stealing what has been paid for by Christ at the cross, then turning around and flogging the church with it. As in the secular world, the unrepentant who are coddled just continue to ply their crimes upon the innocent. **IN THIS AGE OF WORLDLY INTRUSION A HEALTHY CHURCH WILL HAVE DONE SOME DISCIPLINE.** It may have been done quietly and the person restored by discipline is imperative. Otherwise the church will cease to be truly a part of God's church. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth..." (Heb. 12:6).

When there is no disciplining by the church, God's reputation and the innocent are the victims; Satan is the beneficiary. A gossip's charge, true or false, against the pastor or a layman in malice or ignorance turns "...the grace of our God, into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). The pattern and personality of the life and service of another are NOT subject to our understanding or judgment. Being an accuser of the brethren is showing contempt for God's wish and total ingratitude for the grace He has shown us personally. We are to demonstrate God's love and be loyal to each other by giving a good report of each other and follow Matthew 18 in the spirit of restoring, rather than exposing. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:13-16).

Never gossip! Refuse to hear it! Control and prohibit gossip by those under your authority. **GOSSIP DRIVES LOVED ONES, INCLUDING CHILDREN, AWAY FROM GOD'S institution (the church) into the arms of Satan.**

D. Where there is no repentance for a serious offense, removal from church membership can be an act of grace. "These...doth the Lord hate:" they "are an abomination unto him: A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16,19); "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Cor. 5:4,5).

Praise God, there is victory in Christ. God has given it to us so let us walk in it! Our daily prayer should be, "Lord, set a watch on my tongue, help me to speak in love or not at all." As new creatures in Christ, let us confess our sin and renew our walk (II Cor. 5:11,17; I Jn. 1:9; I Cor. 11:31). Be not "...weary in well doing: for in due season we shall

reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:9,10). Never, never fail to support pastors and others when they are using Matthew 18:15-20, to combat gossip.

The Biblical Basis For Church Discipline

I. Bible Command - Individuals Are to Refrain from Judgment

- A. To judge another is to condemn oneself
(Luke 6:37-38; I Cor. 11:28-31; James 4:11-12)
- B. Individuals are incapable of righteous judgment
(Prov. 24:6b; Rom. 14:10-13)
- C. Speaking in public, give a good report
(Eph. 4:29, 5:2; Phil. 4:8)
- D. Derogatory reports made to offender alone!
(Matt. 18:15)

II. Bible Call, the Church is to Exercise Judgment (Matt. 18; I Cor. 5)

- A. The power is God’s
 - 1. Power delegated (Matt. 18:16-20)
 - 2. To bind or loose (Matt. 18:17-19)
 - 3. To deliver unto Satan (I Cor. 5:4, 5,12,13)
- B. The purpose stated (I Cor. 12)
 - 1. For the sake of God’s reputation (Josh. 7:19; John 17:23; I Cor. 10:31)
 - 2. For the sake of the church (Eph. 4:12-16; I Cor. 1:10; I Cor. 5:6, 11; we have an effect on one another I Cor. 12:20-27)
 - 3. For the sake of the individual (I Cor. 5:5; Eph. 4:12-16; Heb. 12:6; prosperity, Prov. 23:13; I Cor. 6:18)
 - 4. For the sake of the community - implied (I Cor. 5:1) “...reported commonly...” (I Peter 3:15-17)
- C. The plan is implemented
 - 1. Deacon’s covenant
 - “We covenant with each other to prayerfully assist the pastor in assessing the situation in relation to God’s Word and to speak with one voice in the presence of church members.
 - “We covenant to remain true to God no matter where discipline leads, realizing compromise is bane and partiality toward individuals is to do them no good.”
 - 2. Isolating the problem
 - a. Begin, Matt. (5:18); Soon, Joshua (7:10-13)
 - b. Not “doubtful disputations” (Rom. 14)
 - c. Sins to be disciplined by the church
Effort to restore per Matt. 18:15, 16; Gal. 6:1 unsuccessful
 - 3. Preparing the congregation

- a. A call for prayer and cleansing
- 4. Confronting the problem (Gal 6:1)
 - a. Confronting the unrepentant (I Cor. 5)
 - v.2 with a sorrowful attitude, humbly Heb. 12:6, 11; Jas. 4:5-10
 - v. 5 “..deliver..unto Satan..” -from Christ’s domain
 - v. 11 “...not to keep company..” do not associate and comfort
 - Also see I Thess. 3:6, withdraw, avoid;
 - II Thess. 3:14, note or put a sign on;
 - I Tim. 6:5, place away;
 - Rom. 16:17, mark and avoid; and I Tim. 1:18-20
 - b. Confronting the repentant (II Cor. 2)
 - 1. The evidence of repentance (II Cor. 7:8-12)

v. 11 “Carefulness” - deep sorrow, to set right, to hasten;
 “Clearing of yourselves” - Greek “apologia,”
 Opportunity to speak for oneself, a personal testimony of repentance and resubmission to the standards of fellowship. Christ suffered a humiliating death in payment for sins of the repentant. Through confession publicly testified to, we are restored.
 “Indignation” - vexation, I hate the sin.
 “Fear” - fervent wish to gain approval of those my sin offended.
 “Vehement desire” - accept guilt, strong wish to remove cause of complaint, proclaim disassociation from the sin.
 “Zeal” - fervent, honest, passionately want restoration.
 “Revenge” - old nature hated, sin is humiliating!
 “All things” - nothing left undone to clear ourselves.
 Conclusion: Genuine repentance includes an apology verified by attitude and action.

- 2. The evidence of forgiveness (II Cor. 2:1-11)
 - v. 7 “comfort” the repentant - encourage by attitude, actions.
 - v. 8 “Confirm you love” - give evidence of your love.
 - Conclusion: Genuine forgiveness involves telling the repentant one you forgive him, and this is to be verified by attitude and actions.

III. Summary of the Bible Mandate Regarding Judgment

- A. Individuals and churches cannot succeed and prosper without discipline and pruning, be it through self-judgment or imposed.
- B. God has given the church the mandate, the authority and responsibility to exercise spiritual judgment as steward of Christ Himself.
- C. The spiritual judgment of the church as a whole relates to commonly reported sins that are spelled out in the Bible. These sins, when unchecked by discipline, defile God’s standards of righteousness. They serve Satan by undermining the message and ministry of the church.

- D. The goal of spiritual judgment is restoration through self-judgment and repentance; if that fails, discipline.
- E. Genuine repentance involves an apology to the offended party(ies) and the ongoing demonstration of its reality.
- F. When genuine repentance occurs, the church is obligated to restore without prejudice.
- G. Blessed result - Psa. 51:7-15; II Cor. 2:4-11, 7:8-16; Phil. 4:13,19.

Chapter IV- **A Clear Conscience, Discernment, and Success**

God does guide those who are in tune spiritually by giving discernment. Strength and success “...belongeth to them...who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). It not only pleases God to guide us in evangelism, HE WANTS TO EMPOWER US TO SUCCEED IN LIFE “....MORE ABUNDANTLY...” (John 10:10b; III John 2; Josh. 1:8; Ps. 35:27).

When we are born again, God’s Spirit comes into our being and dwells with our spirit (I Cor. 3:16). The Bible says, “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord...” (Prov. 20:27). In other words, our spirit sees the truth which is revealed by God’s Spirit. Gods’ indwelling Spirit speaks to our spirit which in turn prompts us through the voice of our conscience. Having a clear conscience is a matter of staying in tune with God, being sensitive to, and FOLLOWING His direction. “And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one...” (John 8:9).

A Clear conscience is to success, health, and our mind what a spark plug is to an engine and a pilot is to a ship. If we abuse our conscience by ignoring and rejecting its message, we become dull in perception and ineffective. “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy...that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck” (I Tim. 1:18,19); “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (mind, will, and emotion)(I Peter 2:11).

Doing things contrary to our conscience (God’s Word and the prompting of His Spirit) fouls up our success at three levels:

A. God’s Spirit and a clear conscience.

God cannot bless (with His power) disobedience any more than a mother can bless her unrepentant son for breaking windows. If she does, she is promoting the destruction of her house and her son’s future. Returning in our mind to God’s standard of right and confessing our guilt in repentance (I John 1:9) removes that sin and clears our conscience with God. “Humble yourselves in

the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10); “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

B. Our own spirit, mind and body.

We are to obey God’s Word. “...receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your soul (mind, will, and emotion)” (Js. 1:21). When we do wrong, God brings the truth that we are sinning to our mind through our conscience. Acting contrary to our conscience is a sin against our own spirit (self) and the truth God has place there. “...perverseness...is a breach in the spirit” (Prov. 15:4); “Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled” (I Cor. 8:7); “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. When I kept silence (from confessing my sin), my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long (the weight of guilt). For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Ps. 32:1,3,4).

It is important to our health and it is important to the sensitivity of the wonderful guidance system, God has given us that we be honest and faithful to our conscience. “Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb. 13:18).

C. Our communications with others and a clear conscience.

God’s Spirit guides us in overcoming pride and Satan’s allurements which have plagued communications between men since the fall. “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:16; “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward” (II Cor. 1:12). We need to walk with a clear conscience, follow the truth, and empowered by God’s Spirit, act in love toward others.

I Corinthians 13:1-8 instructs us on love:

Patience	Love suffereth long and is kind
Humility	Love...is not puffed up
Courtesy	Doth not behave itself unseemly
Unselfishness	Seeketh not her own, envieth not
Good Temper	Is not easily provoked
Guilelessness	Thinkest no evil

Love is not just saying, “I love you,” or “I love others.” We see love on the Cross. Love is communicated by God through us at the spiritual level as well as by our actions and behavior. When we really have the love of God in us we “value the person.” This is a

God-given manner which communicates to the spirit of another. he or she loves me and values me as a person. God gives the spirit of discernment and reconciliation (Tit. 3:2-4). Satan gives the spirit of judgmentalism, denying God's grace, and the power thereof in our relations with others.

When we sin against God and our own conscience, the old nature is on the throne and we commit unloving offenses. When we find that we have committed an unloving offense against another, we must return to God's standard and clear our conscience with God and man (I John 1:9; James 5:16).

The problem is usually seen first in the eyes of the one who has been offended. In this event the options are to forgive and forget or to go to the offender in person alone and seek reconciliation according to Matthew 18:15. Following this format which God has laid out and correcting the offense where it originated demonstrates the practical nature of God's Word (Gal. 5:13-16).

We clear our conscience with the one we have offended by lovingly telling him that we are sorry about it and ask his forgiveness. "He that covereth his sins shall NOT prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Sometimes we may sense that another has an ill feeling toward us and not know why. Even then it is important in serving Christ to seek that one out to see if there is problem which needs to be cleared up (Matt. 5:23,24). We are not only to ask those we offend to forgive us, we are to forgive those who offend us. This forgiving spirit keeps the problem from being a stumbling block in our life, and it keeps the problem with God and the other party where it belongs. Christ emphasized, "...if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent: thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:4).

Having a forgiving spirit is a great personal blessing. When confronted, however, with offenses which appear to endanger the testimony of the church (pastor or members), there is additional responsibility which is very important. In His Word God provided doctrine, Matthew 18:15-20, for the protection of His Church from the scourge of Satan in communication. Each of us in the church, officers and non-officers alike, have a duty before God and our conscience to follow this doctrine. When done in a spirit of meekness, Satan runs head-on with Almighty God (Matt. 18:18-20).

Satan's counterfeit for decency in communication, provided for in Matthew 18, is gossip. He comes as an "angel of light" to those who are proud (II Cor. 11:14; James 4:5-8). Gossip is sharing detrimental information (behind-the-back) with people who are not part of the problem. It is the denial of a right purchased by Christ which we all need a hundred times over.

THE CONCEPT THAT IT IS MORE VIRTUOUS TO AVOID AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE OFFENDER AND TELL THE OFFENSE TO ANOTHER IS A PERVERSION AND IS A REPREHENSIBLE REJECTION OF GOD'S DOCTRINE. SUCH AN ACT IS SIN AGAINST GOD AND ONE'S OWN CONSCIENCE AS WELL AS THE OTHER PARTY. THE GOSSIP'S CHARGE, TRUE OR FALSE, IN MALICE OR IGNORANCE TURNS "...THE GRACE OF OUR GOD INTO LASCIVIOUSNESS, AND DENYING THE ONLY LORD GOD, AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST" (JUDE

4). FOR MANY, INCLUDING OUR CHILDREN, THE CHURCH'S TESTIMONY FOR CHRIST IS SERIOUSLY DAMAGED.

We are to have a clear conscience before God and man when taking communion. We clear our conscience from guilt over the hurt we caused another by repenting and asking forgiveness of those sinned against. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (died early)" (I Cor. 11:29,30).

Allowing oneself to listen to detrimental information, in the absence of the one who is being judged, is wicked and sinful. It is a sin against God and His authority, it is a sin against one's own conscience, and it is a sin against the accused who has an explicit right from God to be present. AN OFFENSE WHICH IS NOT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO DISCUSS WITH THE PERSON HIMSELF IN PRIVATE IS NOT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO TALK ABOUT - PERIOD.

"Now the end of the commandment is charity (LOVE) out of a pure heart, and of a GOOD CONSCIENCE, and of faith unfeigned" (I Tim. 1:5); "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). When we have a clear conscience with God, self and others, God enables us to see through the deception and allurements of the sin-cursed world. It is then we can see truth and God blesses our families. That is success!

It is important to our health and it is important to the sensitivity of the wonderful guidance system God has given us that we be honest and faithful to our conscience. "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Heb. 13:18).

Chapter V -
A Deeper Understanding of the Cancer of Carelessness
in Communications

A. THE BODY

(A doctrinal truth with great implications both in principle and practice) Accepting Christ places us in a new relationship with other Christians. We become partners (members) of the body of Christ with responsibilities to one another. These responsibilities go to the very core of our happiness and our spiritual well being. All members have a Holy purpose, a productive role to fulfill! We cannot say that we (or I)

have no need of the other members. The body is dependent upon a spirit of unity in the members to fulfill its mission, a mission that exceeds any the world can offer. When one member becomes adulterated as with cancer all members are endangered, all suffer (I Cor. 12:12-27).

THE HEAD OF THE BODY. To the Head of the body (Christ) we are connected, and we have a duty to be forever loyal and humble. God saved us from the world and brought us unto Himself - we are saved from the penalty of our sin and eternity in Hell. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us..." (I John 3:16a). Obedience to God shelters us from the power of Satan over our old nature. "...He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him" (Prov. 30:5).

B. WE HAVE A MANDATE FROM GOD

There are certain things which are always evil. They defile (adulterate) members of the body (church) and do great harm to the reputation of God. Doctrinally, these judgments of God have been spelled out "Thus saith the Lord!" There is no room for compromise. There is no room for discussion. They are an infection in the body, a disease upon the members, a cancer that destroys. The worst sins are the sins of unbelief and rebellion to the authority of God. Christ is both man and God! Jesus Christ paid it all on the cross and there is not one work we can do for our salvation! There is no place to question these and other doctrines of God.

We cannot back down. We are not to partake of these sins with others or in the privacy of our own soul (mind). We are NOT to be a stumbling block to others. We are NOT to steal or murder. We are NOT to gossip or commit adultery. These violate and these adulterate! God's affirmative pronouncements are righteous, eternal and true! To compromise is to unleash Satan and promote the cancer.

C. WHO DEFILES THROUGH COMMUNICATION?

"...So is this people...that which they offer there is unclean" (Haggai 2:14).

1. Some of Satan's servants in the local church, the GOSSIPS, BUSYBODIES, ACCUSERS, etc. are not saved! They are headed for a Christless eternity in Hell. They are not members of the body of Christ. They gained admittance to the local church by lying. "All that hate me WHISPER together against me: against me do they devise my hurt" (Ps. 41:7).

2. Many stirring up trouble in the church are born-again Christians. They have compromised the teaching of God and, with their wicked deeds, are DOING THE DEVIL'S WORK. "But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23); "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8); "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of this own lust, and enticed. The when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin (defilement): and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15).

D. WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The problem in those who are serving Satan is not the tongue; it is in the self-righteous (rebellious) heart (mind) of the messenger (Prov. 6:12-19). The heart in REBELLION AGAINST GOD is in trouble with itself as well as God and man! Under the spell of Satan's allurements the heart is desperately wicked, who can know it! The victory has been won by Christ, the Head of the church (body), family and individual Christian. When we REBEL (I am boss) against God and the positions of authority He has established, God no longer is the influence in our life. It is then easy for Satan to control and manipulate our old nature. The imbalance of a self-centered heart - jealousy, haughtiness, bitterness, guilt, guilt displacement, and judgmentalism motivate the messenger to was his (her) tongue for Satan (Prov. 26:23). Those who are used by Satan to defile (divide and destroy) our churches are ALWAYS people who do not have a husband or father exercised to serve God as the head of the home or they are cheating and rebelling against that authority! Men who do NOT exercise godly authority make it possible for Satan to come in and control those under their care. This is tragic! It is significant that godly wives will not express an opinion of another by words or tone or gesture. They are totally mum EXCEPT to their husbands, God's designated authority and family spokesman, or in the privacy of a Matthew 18:15 encounter with another woman (Prov. 19:14). The husband, will do likewise except in the well-defined confines of Matthew 18.

We love the people, but hate their sin. In love we are to draw them to humble themselves before Christ who will heal their disease (rebellious hearts). We do this by following Matthew 18 as previously discussed. If they will not repent (invite Christ back on the throne as THE influence over their life) and turn from their wicked ways (the evidence), then God says to remove the diseased members from the body (Matt. 18:17b). This is not legalism! They are murderers and assassins of the reputation of God. Their sin is against God. We diagnose the sin and remove the cancer (unrepentant) in obedience to God (Matt. 18:16,17a). "...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Eph. 5:11,12). "Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off..." (Ps. 101:5).

E. HOW TO IDENTIFY EVIL COMMUNICATIONS

1. Knowledge of God's Word. "Lest Satan should get an advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (II Cor. 2:11). God's Word tells us that an offense (even if true) should not be whispered or told behind the person's back. The grace of God inherent in Matthew 18 is to abound. At stake is the life or defilement of the church's witness for Christ in our community.

2. Be Strong. God gives strength to those who walk with a "good conscience" (I Tim. 18,19). It takes strength of spiritual maturity to go to a brother who appears to be violating God's "Thus saith the Lord." EVERY MEMBER (not just pastor and deacons) has the DUTY (from God) to restore that brother (Matt. 18:15) and, if rejected, arrange for a yes or no diagnosis (Matt. 18:16,17) by those who are spiritual (impartial and can see things as God sees them).

3. Discern by the Aid of God's Spirit the evils of gossip and careless talk. He who is spiritual discerneth all things (Heb. 5:14; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:23-32; I John 1:9; I Cor. 2:15).

4. Understand the Consequences of Tolerating or compromising with accusers of the brethren - the gossips, whisperers, slanderers and busybodies (from typical case histories of problem-plagued churches).

a. Destroys confidence between members who then find it difficult to trust and work in a spirit of unity. “The WORDS of a talebearer are as WOUNDS...” (Prov. 26:22).

b. Causes fellowship to be broken. Team members are discouraged or totally separated. “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that REPEATETH a matter SEPARATETH very friends” (Prov. 17:9).

c. Failure of the members to enforce God’s safety net (Matt. 18) gives Satan the upper hand to defile. “...lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be DEFILED” (Heb. 12:15); “...a whisperer SEPARATETH CHIEF FRIENDS” (Prov. 16:28).

d. The prince of darkness is a gentleman. Satan much prefers to have as his agents people in positions of leadership (a church officer or an officer’s wife) because this tends to enhance the impact (defilement) of their lips (I Tim. 3). “He that hateth DISSEMBLETH with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; when he SPEAKETH FAIR, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart” (Prov. 26:24,25).

e. Gossips and busybodies, though few, become unified against the leadership of the church. “A WICKED doer HEED to false lips...” (Prov. 17:4).

f. The reputation of God’s servant is stolen and murdered by the thief who is unknown. God’s servant is left defenseless not even knowing who is the accuser or what law of God he may have offended. “...LET NONE of you SUFFER as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters” (I Peter 4:15).

g. The tongues of the wicked, though few, adulterate the minds of those who do not understand the evil of gossip. The unsuspecting are defiled, their minds are violated with unreliable reports. This group (the untaught and unperceptive, even if only 15% of the church membership), when defiled by gossip, destabilize the church and ruin its effectiveness for God. IT IS THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND SATAN’S WAYS TO DO THEIR BEST TO SEE THAT ALL RECOGNIZE THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF GOSSIP (RELATED EVILS) AND THE PERSONAL DUTY TO GOD FOR THE APPLICATION OF MATHEW 18. “KEEP back thy servant also FROM PRESUMPTIOUS (unknowingly trusting evil communication) sins...” (Ps. 19:13).

h. To Satan’s glee, leadership in the church is undermined and God’s control (authority) destabilized. The gossip of the troublemakers, motivated by their jealousy and desire to rule, divides the church and destroys the spirit of unity. Officers are confused; sometimes more concerned about the threats of gossips to leave the church than the terrible problems which gossips create. Some

loyal families (non-gossiping tithers) may give up and leave the church. **WHEN UNDISCIPLINED, THE GOSSIPS REMAIN INTRENCHED, READY TO UNDERMINE THE NEXT PASTOR.** “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and **EVERY EVIL WORK**” (James 3:16).

i. Satan’s agents (Rev. 12:10b) defile the body and bring great harm to the reputation of God. The church, divided and bickering, has become the laughing stock of the community!! The pastor and his family (usually the object of the wicked, careless talk) have been given less grace than the world gives a common criminal. The ministry of the church, to many in the community, is forever lost - a reminder of disgrace to decent behavior and treatment of others. It may be a year before some of the workers get peace in their hearts over the hurt. Some never forgive. **THE CHURCH HAS BEEN RAVAGED**111 “...the **TONGUE** is a fire, a world of iniquity...it **DEFILETH** the whole **BODY**, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell” (James 3:6).

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (I Thess. 5:12,13). “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem **OTHER** better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3).

F. HOW TO SCREEN OUT AND AVOID EXPOSURE (DEFILEMENT) BY GOSSIPS AND QUIET THEIR EVIL WAYS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCH

“A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished: (Prov. 27:12)

1. STOP THEM WHEN IT SEEMS THEY ARE GOING TO GOSSIP

“Please - just a minute- I am not sure I want to know.”

2. QUESTION THEM

“Does this have something to do with a defect in another person’s character or abilities?” If so, “Have you confronted them with it personally in private?” (Matt. 18:15). If not, “This is very important, We must go to them in person, lest they be helpless to correct it and great damage be done by what is said to others!” “You **MUST** go to them, and I will **THEN** hear of your concerns **AND** their response.” (Matt. 18:15,16)

3. HOLD THE THREE PARTIES ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD

Insist on this, all three - the accused, the concerned and you are accountable for being sure Matthew 18 is **NOT** bypassed! Do **NOT** let them escape **ACCOUNTABILITY**. You may be the only link to save the church from the ravage of gossip. It may be a question of life or death (or worse) of the witness for Christ in your community. Advise the person that their concern may be very important, but we all make mistakes. We are all sinners. God uses sinners. We **MUST** follow the Matthew 18 doctrine closely. We must not be careless and give Satan an opening.

G. IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM OF DEFILEMENT IN ONE’S SELF

“...God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Gal. 6:14); “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Ps. 26:2); “...all

things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

Our mind is defiled with unreliable information (cancer of communications), and we violate our conscience in its walk with God when we allow our mind to receive second-hand reports of a derogatory nature about another which has not been screened by Matthew 18. “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving (disobeying the Word of God) is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Titus 1:15).

1. Am I trusting God to give me discernment about others or do I trust the opinion (surveying) of busybodies? (Defilement) “An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire” (Prov. 16:27).

2. Have I yielded to curiosity when Mr. or Mrs. Important offered derogatory details about another? (Defilement) “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3).

3. Am I pulling away from another in my spirit even though I did not personally see him commit an offense or receive the report properly through God’s Matthew 18 doctrine? (Defilement) “...a whisperer separateth chief friends” (Prov. 16:28).

4. Are people who judge pastors and others my friends? (Defilement) “...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” (James 4:4).

5. Do I find myself bitter or judging another because of second-hand information not screened by the Matthew 18 procedure? (Defilement) “As coals are to burning coals and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife” (Prov. 26:21).

6. Do I pass on derogatory information about others received outside the Matthew 18 sequence? (Defilement) “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit” (Prov. 15:4); “Charity...doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (I Cor. 13:4,5).

Are my children (or spouse) rejecting the church? Am I a wicked person who goes around making derogatory reports; a wretched one; making accusations; a gossip? They may have been wrong, but I am much, much worse! God cannot enable me to be a good example unless I accept the fact that I have a problem. “...thou are inexcusable...whosoever thou art that judgest:...thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things” (Rom. 2:1); “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

H. CONQUERING SIN IN COMMUNICATIONS

1. Admit the problem! Turn to God for restoration and cleansing (the heart and mind from defilement). “If we CONFESS OUR SINS, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (John 1:9).

2. ALWAYS place interpretations which are Biblical (truth) on your conscious observations. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul (the mind to see, retain, and act upon truth): the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7).

3. HUMBLY assess your relationship with those who have been hurt in violation of Matthew 18 and Galatians 6:1. “CONFESS your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed...” (James 5:16).

4. Give your expectations of others to God. "...lean not unto thine own understanding. IN ALL THY WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5,6); "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you" (I Pet. 5:7); "...Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).

5. Separate yourself from the accusers of the brethren, the gossips, the whisperers, and busybodies; "...HAVE NO FELLOWSHIP with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather REPROVE them" (Eph. 5:11); "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned: and AVOID THEM" (Rom. 16:17).

6. Take practical steps to control you tongue.

a. Realize your vulnerability! FLEE from thought patterns and situations which tempt you to sin. "Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake...bring my soul (mind) out of trouble" (Ps. 143:11); "...Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

b. Think before you talk! Will this promote the reputation of my brother and God? LOVE the one they are accusing and the one who offended you! "...above all things, have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins" (I Pet. 4:8); "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister GRACE unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

c. ACT NOW "Whoso keepeth (holdeth) his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul (mind) from troubles" (Prov. 21-23).

SUMMARY

1. Seek to understand the person before you proceed to be sure you are understood.
2. Be aware of non-verbal communication - facial expression, tone of voice, dress, etc.
3. Disagree, but do not disrespect.
4. Listen - do not interrupt!
5. When you are wrong, admit it; but when you are right, keep quiet.
6. Limit derogatory reports to the person who has committed the offense and make the report in love.
7. Communication Killers:
 - a. Gossip, backbiting, stealing words
 - b. Hard words such as hate, always and never!
 - c. Silence, ignoring, pouting
 - d. Discouraging words, tearing down words
 - e. Emotionalism: crying, anger, sarcasm
 - f. Dishonest communication, careless talk, shallow talk
 - g. Nagging words, repeating criticisms

He that would live in peace and rest, must hear and see, and say the best!

KEEP SATAN DEFROCKED!

Establish Matthew 18:15-20 in its importance!

Matthew 18 is as important (its order and its spirit of love and humility) to the PROCESS of everyday life (fellowship) as John 3:16 is to the GIFT of eternal salvation. It should be as thoroughly engrafted into the souls of our people.

Personality dislikes and the sins which gossips condemn have been paid for by Christ on the Cross of Calvary! Matthew 18 is God's doctrine for resolving our problems and keeping our sins covered so Satan cannot run with them and scourge the church (fellowship).

How we communicate is very important because the way we do it is an extension of God or Satan (Ephesians 4). It is not just a means to an end - it is an end in itself. We either implement God's grace (Matthew 18) for communicating or we serve Satan in his quest to divide the flock.

Master the subject of communicating as Christians and the need for church discipline will be very infrequent.

David A. Norris