

## CHRISTIAN SOCIAL DISTANCING

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INTRO: I have one more message I want to do, that is related to our present pandemic. There is a lesson to be learned, but it is not pleasant. No doubt, most will not want to hear it. But this might be the only time that even a few will listen to a message like this. Those who begin to listen may turn this message off before they finish. But in our present coronavirus pandemic we have the opportunity to learn a huge Bible truth. It is the truth of social distancing and what happens when you don't.

In another message I called man's pandemic the sinavirus. This is a spiritual disease and everybody has it and it is %100 percent fatal. But it has pleased God to save those from among mankind who are willing to repent of their sins and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and then live the rest of their lives by faith.

God has no greater desire than to save man and keep him for His own eternal glory. It is not His will that any should perish. But man has a virus that will destroy him in hell for all eternity. And so God sent His only Son into the world, but man so loved his sin that he killed the One who exposed his sin. Amazingly, it was those who professed to know God that were at the forefront of getting rid of the Man who exposed their sinfulness.

But unbeknown to Satan, who stood in the shadows and egged on the professing believers of the day to crucify Christ, the very thing he did that caused Christ to die, was the thing that God would use to destroy him in the end.

And so Christ died, but to the amazement of all, He was raised from the dead and lives today. He ascended bodily into heaven and there He sits at the right hand of God Almighty in the Holy of Holies in the holiest place in the universe; the tabernacle in heaven that was made without hands.

And now, day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year some are being saved. They are few in number, but they are dedicated and committed for life. But Satan is infuriated with such as truly get saved, and he is able to draw back into his clutches a good number of those who have once committed their lives to Jesus Christ. Satan has two great objectives; destroy Israel, and destroy the Church! And one of the ways he has been successful in bringing the modern church to eat out of his hands, is the failure by the Church to practice social distancing.

#### I. THE BIBLICAL PROBLEM

So we want to look first at the problem I am addressing. It is a problem that began as soon as people began to get saved. The first earth was destroyed when sin had corrupted almost all of mankind. Then God destroyed all but 8 people in the flood. Turn to Genesis 12. After the flood, when man began to repopulate again, so did sin. And God began to seek out a people for Himself, and He called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. In order for God to keep Abraham from being corrupted, He had to socially distance him from Ur, where he lived, and its corruption.

Genesis 12:1-4 says:

*1 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.*

*2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.*

*3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

*4 So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*

If Abraham had not distanced himself from all his relatives and the people of Ur, God could not have worked through him to accomplish that which he wanted to accomplish. That is clear from the destruction of man in the flood.

Well, in the process of time, God formed the nation of Israel from the people of Abraham and they were His people. God socially distanced them from the nations of the world. When God's people were taken to Egypt, once again God had to socially distance them from the world. So He called Moses and delivered His people out of Egypt, He gave them laws that would forever separate and distance them from the world.

Well, Israel, though they were separated from the world, had people, and all people have a free will, and among God's people there were those who disobeyed God. So how would God keep His people from sin, when sin happened within the nation? Well, we'll look at that. Turn to Exodus 12. As soon as Israel came out of Egypt, they kept the first Passover, and God instituted the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Exodus 12:15 we read this:

*Ex 12:15 'Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.'*

If sin arose from among those whom God had called out of the world, such disobedient persons were to be 'cut off' from Israel. They were socially distanced. Now Bible teachers are not agreed as to whether the phrase 'cut off' means by death or by socially separating them from the rest. We call this excommunication. But either way, disobedience and sin led to those who practiced those things from being cut off.

There is a biblical principle that always holds true. When sin happens among those who are Christians, that sin must be dealt with or it will corrupt the rest. Today we have a

weak church in which the majority of professing Christians are not true believers and it is due to a failure to uphold this biblical principle.

So God set out a way for His people to follow by which He would seek to protect His people from those within the congregation who became infected by sin. In the OT God's greatest work, after the time of Abraham, was His work in Israel. To keep Israel from becoming infected from within, He set out social distancing to keep His people pure. Those who committed such sins as adultery were killed. For some other sins, they were now separated from worshipping with the rest.

Well, when the promised Messiah came, the nation of Israel rejected Him and had Him crucified. After His resurrection, God then began the Church. God's greatest ongoing work on earth today is the Church! That work is almost over. And when it is over, God will complete His last work with Israel and it will happen in the tribulation time, which lies now shortly before us.

Now when the Church began, immediately sin set in in God's new work. God set out a lesson in Ananias and Saphira, and they died. It is a constant battle to keep sin from infecting those within the Church. There are in the Church first of all, implants that Satan puts among the people of God. These are professing Christians who have never been truly born again. They are very hard to detect, as the Lord's parable of the tares and the wheat so clearly illustrates.

But worse than that, Satan sends ministers into the church. They are not true Christians, but you can hardly detect them from true Christians. They are preachers and teachers. They are Satan's angels of light.

Then, on top of that, there are believers who start to slip into sin. And if sin gets serious, and it is not dealt with, it infects the whole church. And when it is not detected, it can do huge damage to a church. We have

seen that first hand. But when it is detected, God set out instructions whereby the Church was to be kept pure.

And how did God plan to keep the Church from being destroyed by those who entered its ranks unsaved or turned back to sin? By instructing those in the true Church to practice social distancing! The instructions for this are very clear in the Bible, but today the Church, almost universally, is failing to do that which God instructed them to do. And this is at least one reason why the Church grows weaker and weaker.

What is this practice of social distancing? We know it as excommunication. This, I assure you, is a subject we do not want to hear about today. Our day of the teachings of unconditional grace, unconditional eternal security, unconditional love, and unconditional forgiveness have drowned out the Church's ability to hear God's voice on this matter!

I want to briefly set out the main pieces of instruction whereby God seeks to keep the Church pure.

## II. THE BIBLICAL PRESCRIPTION

### A. Matthew 18:15-18

We go first to Matthew 18. Here Jesus said:

15 *"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.'*

17 *"And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

18 *"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

It is not my purpose to deal with our subject in detail but I want to point out a few things. What is involved is a three step process. The matter before us is a sin that has taken place between two Christians. The first step is for the one who has been sinned against to seek to deal with it with the fellow Christian alone. In 26 years of ministry I have never seen this happen. One time one man came to me about an issue. When it was looked into it, this man's own life did not seem to be in order.

So if the Christian that sinned against the other does not deal with the issue, now one is to take another Christian along to verify things. If the wrongdoer still does not deal with it, now it is to go to the church. If, when the church approaches him, and he still refuses to deal with the issue, he is to be to the rest in the church like a heathen and a tax collector.

Two very common errors are made here. First, most Christians conclude that every sin issue in the church is dealt with by this three step process. We will see later that this is not the case.

Second, when it says that this person is to be to you like a heathen and a tax collector, most Christians I know conclude that means you now try to win them back, just like you do unbelievers. That, again, is a huge error. That is the exact opposite of what is to happen. We can learn that from the present practice of social distancing.

What did the Jews do with heathen and tax collectors? They practiced social distancing! The clear meaning here is excommunication. It is to avoid such a

Christian and not socialize with them. I do not see how anyone can come to any other conclusion.

And last, Jesus said, after dealing with the social distancing:

*18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

Simply stated, this verse gives the church the authority and the responsibility to practice excommunication. When a Christian lives without repenting of his sin, God excommunicates them in heaven. They do not have direct access to God anymore. When it says, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven," the words, 'will be bound' are in the perfect tense. It would literally read, "Whatever you bind on earth 'will have been bound in heaven already.'

When one Christian sins against another, God excommunicates them. When the church now excommunicates them, they are agreeing with heaven. A church that does not practice excommunication is not in agreement with God in heaven if they have members living in sin. Such sinners are not in good standing in heaven, but in church they are seldom dealt with. This brings shame to the Lord and weakens the Church. And because social distancing is not practiced when it should be, that undealt with Christian spreads the sin virus among the people.

#### B. 1 Corinthians 5

We go next to 1 Corinthians 5. A professing Christian in the Corinthian church had taken his step-mother to wife. And the church, which was a carnal church, gloried in the fact of their great liberties in Christ. Then a certain woman's household, out of concern, informed Paul about this and so we'll read

what it says and comment briefly as we go. I am reading from the NKJV but I will read the words translated 'sexual immorality' as fornication. The original word is *pornia* and should be translated 'fornication.'

*1 It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!*

*2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*

The Corinthian church, rather than weeping about such sin in the church was puffed up. That is they were proud. The Corinthians should have mourned and this man should have been taken away from among them. That is he should have been socially distanced, or excommunicated.

Verse 3:

*3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.*

*4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*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.*

Paul is saying, "I am not there with you, but without being there I will tell you plainly that I have judged this case without being there. You should gather together and excommunicate this person immediately. Now notice carefully, there is no three step process here. It is simply, do it and do it now! In such a



case there is only one step and it is to be taken immediately.

So Paul will give several reasons why they should excommunicate this person. First, if they don't and he lives on like this he will be lost. The spirit will be lost in the day of the Lord Jesus!

Paul then says:

*6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

*7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

*8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Leaven is a picture of sin. Here is the second reason why sinning Christians should be excommunicated. Like leaven, they infect the whole lump, or the church. A Christian who lives in deep sin is like a person with a very serious virus who infects those among whom he or she lives.

I believe that failure to obey such Scriptures is one of the reasons why the Church as a whole is so weak today.

Verse 9:

*9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with fornicators.*

*10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*

11 *But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, 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."*

Social distancing is to be practiced by Christians with sinning Christians, not with unbelievers. Paul says if you practiced this with unbelievers, you would have to go out of the world.

Now you must understand that this is not just I or some others teach. This is what God's Word says!

#### C. 2 Thessalonians 3

Now if you are a Christian under 50 years of age, what I am telling you probably sounds very strange to your ears. Turn to 2 Thessalonians 3. Maybe some who will listen to this message have grown up on today's love teaching. We are an effeminate generation. We do not know how to stand for truth. And if what we learned in 1 Corinthians 5 sounds harsh to you, what I am about to tell you will shock you. You may have to look several times to see if this is actually what the Bible says. And when you see it does, you may say, "It must mean something else!" But it doesn't mean something else. It just sounds so strange because we hear so much taught about love and don't hear this taught.

We begin in 2 Thessalonians 3:6:

6 *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.*

Here is social distancing! What Paul is dealing with here is lazy Christians. I have not time to give all the evidence but enough comes out in the chapter to show this. Other evidence is found elsewhere both in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Now Paul says they were to practice Christian social distancing when he says Christians are to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly.

My wife pointed out that one of the latest Israel My Glory magazines has an article on this very passage. Well, I was interested in what they taught. Let me encourage you to read that if you get this magazine. They teach exactly what I am saying here. I was so encouraged to hear that.

Verse 7:

*7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;*

*8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,*

*9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*

*10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*

*11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*

*12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

Here we see clearly what the issue is. And fellow believers are to withdraw from a Christian who does not work but sits in the coffee shop all the time or gossips in other ways. We go on:

*13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

*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.*

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

So a believer who has been admonished is to be shunned by fellow believers. Why is this? This is to keep sin from spreading in the church. And for how long has the church not disciplined for serious matters, never mind something like laziness! And why is the Church as a whole so very weak today? Here is one of the reasons for that.

Now you can imagine that if we do not obey the other Scriptures we read, without question, we won't obey this one.

### III. THIS BIBLICAL TEACHING ABANDONED

Today, sad to say, the professing Church is in bad shape and at least partly it is because we have abandoned, or forsaken, this biblical teaching. The majority of professing believers are not saved. One of the reasons is that the Church, by and large, has forsaken the biblical teaching of social distancing, or excommunication as it used to be called.

Some years ago I was given an article by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. the ninth president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest denomination in the United States. The article is called: *Church Discipline: The Missing Mark*. Let me just say that because I quote him does not

mean I agree with all his teaching. I know very little about him. But this article is very good.

At the top of his article he has a quote by John Cassian, who lived a few hundred years after Christ. The quote says: "What is pure is corrupted much more quickly than what is corrupt is purified."

Here is how Mohler's article begins:

**The** decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.

Each of these sentences is loaded and would take time to unpack. He says church discipline, social distancing in the church, is perhaps the most visible failure of the modern church. We are not concerned with maintaining moral purity. Then he says:

The absence of church discipline is no longer remarkable—it is generally not even noticed. Regulative and restorative church discipline is, to many church members, no longer a meaningful category, or even a memory. The present generation of both ministers and church members is virtually without experience of biblical church discipline.

He is saying churches fail to discipline and we don't even notice! We don't discipline sinning church members to regulate and restore them to right living. Today, church discipline is no longer meaningful, as a matter of fact, we mostly don't notice it is missing! Those in the pew and those in the pulpit have virtually no experience of biblical church discipline!

He goes on like this:

As a matter of fact, most Christians introduced to the biblical teaching concerning church discipline confront the issue of church discipline as an idea they have never before encountered. At first hearing, the issue seems as antiquarian and foreign as the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials...

Here is amazing insight into today's church! Church discipline is like an antique we have no idea what it is. It is so old fashioned as to be rendered useless.

And then he says:

And yet, without a recovery of functional church discipline—firmly established upon the principles revealed in the Bible—the church will continue its slide into moral dissolution and relativism. Evangelicals have long recognized discipline as the “third mark” of the authentic church. Authentic biblical discipline is not an elective, but a necessary and integral mark of authentic Christianity.

He is saying that if we don't restore church discipline, things will only get worse. He says church discipline is not something you can choose or leave as you like. It is one of the necessary marks of an authentic church.

Most of the folk around here have heard of church discipline. When we left a church in the community, they restored to fellowship a couple that had been excommunicated. They did so on no solid evidence of repentance. And no sooner was the couple gone and life was right back to where it had been from before they were married. And what did the church do about that? It is highly doubtful that the matter has even been checked into! All is love. Such irresponsibility be must be met at the judgement.

I continue Mohler's article:

How did this happen? How could the church so quickly and pervasively abandon one of its most essential functions and responsibilities? The answer is found in developments both internal and external to the church.

Put simply, the abandonment of church discipline is linked to American Christianity's creeping accommodation to American culture. As the twentieth century began, this accommodation became increasingly evident as the church acquiesced to a culture of moral individualism.

Mohler blames the churches drift from the practice of social distancing from professing Christians who practice sinful lifestyles to adopting the moral individualism of the culture of America. He says that the answer to the churches quick fall away from church discipline is to be found both inside and outside the church. He then speaks

of that which is outside the church which influenced the people.

I believe the blame lies mostly at the feet of the pastors. When it comes to church discipline, the teachings of unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness, unconditional eternal security and unconditional grace have drowned out any thought of church discipline. Discipline in the home is hard. Discipline in the church is harder. That is why a man whose family is not in order is not to be in church leadership. How can you discipline in church when you don't discipline at home? How can you discipline someone whom you have unconditionally forgiven? Don't the other conditionals all tell you it is going to all be ok anyway? These teachings have so taken the fear of God out of the church that social distancing seems incompatible with Christian love.

He goes on like this:

Though the nineteenth century was not a golden era for American evangelicals, the century did see the consolidation of evangelical theology and church patterns. Manuals of church discipline and congregational records indicate that discipline was regularly applied. Protestant congregations exercised discipline as a necessary and natural ministry to the members of the church, and as a means of protecting the doctrinal and moral integrity of the congregation.

As ardent congregationalists, the Baptists left a particularly instructive record of nineteenth-century discipline. Historian Gregory A. Wills aptly commented, "To an antebellum Baptist, a church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church." Churches held regular "Days of Discipline" when the congregation would gather to heal breaches of fellowship, admonish wayward members, rebuke the obstinate, and, if necessary, excommunicate those who resisted discipline. In so doing, congregations understood themselves to be following a biblical pattern laid down by Christ and the apostles for the protection and correction of disciples.

According to Mohler, in the early 1900's church discipline was still in practice and the church was kept from sin within through church discipline. But then something happened and he explains it like this:

By the turn of the century, however, church discipline was already on the decline. In the wake of the Enlightenment, criticism of the Bible and of the doctrines of evangelical orthodoxy was widespread. Even the most conservative denominations began to show evidence of decreased attention to theological orthodoxy. At the same

time, the larger culture moved toward the adoption of autonomous moral individualism. The result of these internal and external developments was the abandonment of church discipline as ever larger portions of the church member's life were considered off-limits to the congregation.

This great shift in church life followed the tremendous cultural transformations of the early twentieth century—an era of “progressive” thought and moral liberalization. By the 1960s, only a minority of churches even pretended to practice regulative church discipline. Significantly, confessional accountability and moral discipline were generally abandoned together.

After this he points out something that I have studied a great deal as a pastor. He writes:

The theological category of sin has been replaced, in many circles, with the psychological concept of therapy. As Philip Reiff has argued, the “Triumph of the Therapeutic” is now a fixture of modern American culture.<sup>3</sup> Church members may make poor choices, fail to live up to the expectations of an oppressive culture, or be inadequately self-actualized—but they no longer sin.

I have pondered this. The teaching of psychology has replaced church discipline for a number of churches. Psychology is widespread in the church today and if a church has a problem with certain members who are living in sin, it has become an issue to solve by Christian counselors or psychologists. There are Christian psychology clinics. There are Christian rehab centres. When a drunk is to be excommunicated, he is sent to a rehab centre to be reformed. I am not saying there is no place for this. I'm not sure where the boundaries are. But fornicators, adulterers, alcoholics and those who do drugs should be excommunicated. Instead we spend years on rehabilitation.

We continue with the quote:

Individuals now claim an enormous zone of personal privacy and moral autonomy. The congregation—redefined as a mere voluntary association—has no right to intrude into this space. Many congregations have forfeited any responsibility to confront even the most public sins of their members. Consumed with pragmatic methods of church growth and congregational engineering, most churches leave moral matters to the domain of the individual conscience.



....The very notion of shame has been discarded by a generation for which shame is an unnecessary and repressive hindrance to personal fulfillment. Even secular observers have noted the shamelessness of modern culture. As James Twitchell comments:

We have in the last generation tried to push shame aside. The human-potential and recovered-memory movements in psychology; the moral relativism of audience-driven Christianity; the penalty-free, all-ideas-are-equally-good transformation in higher education; the rise of no-fault behavior before the law; the often outrageous distortions in the telling of history so that certain groups can feel better about themselves; and the “I’m shame-free, but you should be ashamed of yourself” tone of political discourse are just some of the instances wherein this can be seen.<sup>5</sup>

Twitchell sees the Christian church aiding and abetting this moral transformation and abandonment of shame—which is, after all, a natural product of sinful behavior. “Looking at the Christian Church today, you can only see a dim penitence of what was once painted in the boldest of colors. Christianity has simply lost *it*. It no longer articulates the ideal. Sex (PS physical immorality) is on the loose. Shame days are over. The Devil has absconded with sin.” As Twitchell laments, “Go and sin no more” has been replaced with “Judge not lest you be judged.”

Demonstration of this moral abandonment is seen in mainline Protestantism’s surrender to an ethic of sexual “liberation.” Liberal Protestantism has lost any moral credibility in the sexual sphere. Homosexuality is not condemned, even though it is clearly condemned in the Bible. To the contrary, homosexuals get a special caucus at the denominational assembly and their own publications and special rights.

I won’t take time to explain all that, but he covers very important things like “The human-potential and recovered-memory movements in psychology.” What we are most familiar with in this regard is the “Caring For The Heart” ministries.

Later he writes:

Evangelicals, though still claiming adherence to biblical standards of morality, have overwhelmingly capitulated to the divorce culture. Where are the evangelical congregations that hold married couples accountable for maintaining their marriage vows? To a great extent, evangelicals are just slightly behind liberal Protestantism in accommodating to the divorce culture and accepting what amounts to “serial monogamy”—faithfulness to one marital partner *at a time*.

Let me add that the breakdown of pastors regarding divorce and remarriage has had a huge impact on a loosening of social distancing. And how does all this affect church

discipline? Mohler wrote this article some time ago and he says this:

The result of this is the loss of the biblical pattern for the church— and the impending collapse of authentic Christianity in this generation. As Carl Laney laments, “The church today is suffering from an infection which has been allowed to fester . . . As an infection weakens the body by destroying its defense mechanisms, so the church has been weakened by this ugly sore. The church has lost its power and effectiveness in serving as a vehicle for social, moral, and spiritual change. This illness is due, at least in part, to a neglect of church discipline.”

In light of the present coronavirus, let me rephrase what Carl Laney has lamented, “The church today is suffering from a virus from which it has failed to socially distance itself, and has thus been allowed to infect the whole church...As the virus weakens the body by destroying its defense mechanisms, so the church has been weakened by the failure to keep the church pure by dealing with sin.”

The Belgic Confession, in article 29, gives three marks of a true church. It says this:

*The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults.*

Now one may or may not agree with that, but it is worth thinking through. If that is correct, a church that does not discipline erring members is not a true church. So Mohler says this in his article:

The mandate of the church is to maintain true gospel doctrine and order. A church lacking these essential qualities is, biblically defined, not a true church. That is a hard thing to say, for it clearly indicts thousands of American congregations who long ago abandoned this essential mark and have accommodated themselves to the spirit of the age. Fearing lawsuits and lacking courage, these churches allow sin to go unconfessed, and heresy to grow unchecked. Inevitably, the false unity they seek to preserve gives way to the factions that inevitably follow the gradual abandonment of biblical Christianity. They do not taste the true unity of a church grounded on the truth and exercising the ministry of the keys.

One more quote from this article where he quotes another:

John Leadley Dagg, the author of a well-known and influential church manual of the nineteenth century, noted: "It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it." If so, and I fear it is so, Christ has abandoned many churches who are blissfully unaware of His departure.

CONCL: And to conclude, most Christians could take a scissor and cut out Matthew 18:15-18; also 1 Corinthians 5, and 2 Thessalonians 3, and they would not notice they were gone. And those who leave it in read over those passages and they just don't get it. Others say, "Well, it can't mean that!"

Some Christians are about this subject as Sir Winston Churchill said some people are about truth. He said, "Some people stumble over the truth, and pick themselves up and dust themselves off and walk on as though nothing happened." It seems to me that is what happens to many who read the passages I have just mentioned.

I mention one other thing that we might learn from our present epidemic. I have always been afraid that if a swing came, that excommunication would begin to take place as it should, that we might swing to the other extreme and excommunicate for reasons it should not take place for. Our present practice of social distancing seems to be going in that direction.