

The Importance of Truth, Categories of Interpretive Consensus, and Soul Liberty: Church Membership in the Balance

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Medical doctors normally address health problems through a series of three steps: diagnosis, prescription, and treatment. The ills of the Conservative Holiness Movement (CHM) have been diagnosed so often that its members have wearied of diagnoses. We have heard many, and they have generally been long on description and short on prescription. “The Call to the Conservative Holiness Movement” Bro. Smith just delivered is a welcome move from diagnosis to prescription. It is indeed time for prescription and especially for treatment. Health cannot revive without filling the prescription and applying the remedy.

It is not my purpose, nor am I capable, to provide a *comprehensive* treatment plan for all our ills or even for the few that I am addressing in this paper. It is my purpose, however, to offer my best efforts to you for your consideration, improvement and, most of all, edification in love. If there is anything of value in my remarks, I will rejoice in the grace of God that is wholly responsible for it.

“The Call” we just heard addresses its prescriptions to both the inner needs of the CHM—biblical fidelity, Christian holiness, Methodist piety, church authority, corporate worship, consistent discipleship, resurgent hope—and the outer needs—a reclamation of our historic roots, continuity with all believers, Christian community, and consistent evangelism.

This paper seeks to address the conceptual and practical interface between the inner and outer facets of our movement. I will first develop three components that we believe are indispensable for reclaiming “the richness of our Christian heritage and our essential unity with all who truly confess [Jesus] as Lord”¹: levels of importance in truth, categories of interpretive consensus, and soul liberty. Second, I will attempt to apply those concepts to perhaps the most vexing intersection of the inner and outer dimensions of our movement: church membership.

¹ “The Call to the Conservative Holiness Movement,” section II.

Levels of Importance in Truth

All truth is important, for all truth originates from God. There are no unimportant truths. There are no “categories” or “levels” of truth which may be dismissed as inconsequential, trivial, or irrelevant. All truth is eternally important.

At the same time, Jesus taught us that some Scriptural commands are more weighty or important than other commands. For example, in Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus identifies loving God and loving others as more important than any other commands in the Law. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites, “You tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”² This passage teaches us at least two things about Scriptural commands: 1) Some commands like “do justice and love mercy” are more important than other commands such as tithing one’s garden herbs. 2) All the commands of Scripture must be obeyed regardless of their relative importance. Jesus did not say that it was acceptable for the scribes not to tithe as long as they took care of “justice, mercy, and faithfulness.” He said, “These are the things you should have done without neglecting the others [tithing].”

Scripture also teaches us about levels of importance in truths that are not commands through how we are told to handle disbelief or disagreement regarding truth.³ For example, in Gal. 1:8-9 Paul anathematizes those who refuse to believe that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. In 2 John 1:7-11 John writes that we must not receive into our homes or even give greetings to those who claim to be Christian and yet deny that Christ came in the flesh. In Titus 3:10 Paul says that after one or two admonitions church leaders are to reject factious or divisive persons (cf. Rom. 16:17-18). In 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul directs the Thessalonian church not to eat or associate with the idle brother since he has rejected Paul’s appeals to return to work; however, they were not to regard him as an “enemy” but as a brother. And in Romans 14 Paul tells the Roman Christians that they must accept a brother who does not believe that all food is clean and avoid the issue when discussion leads only to dispute.

In each of the passages just listed truth was at issue. But since not all truth is equally important, God handles disbelief in different ways. In matters related to the Gospel and the unity of believers, separation and rejection was mandated (Gal. 1:8-9;

² The phrase translated “the weightier matters of the law” is τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου. The standard lexicons understand Jesus’ use of the term βαρύτερα to signify matters that are more important than others. For example, BDAG translates this phrase, “the more important provisions of the law” (s.v., βαρύς).

³ One may also discern levels of importance in truth through a study of Old Testament levels of punishment within the Israelite theocracy, the grounds for prophesied judgments on the gentile nations as well as the severity of judgments handed down, the types of sacrifice required for different kinds of sin, restitution levels for various crimes, and actions receiving God’s curse.

2 John 1:7-11; Tit. 3:10). In the case of idleness or disorderliness justified by bad theology—Jesus is coming back soon! Why work?—the church was to shun the disobedient brother in hopes that shame would bring him to repentance and restored fellowship (2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15). In matters like the acceptability of eating meat or the holiness of certain days, the Roman believers were not to separate from the weaker brother but to accept him, limit their liberty, and seek his edification (Rom. 14:1-15:5). In other words, Scripture matches the seriousness of the church's response to unbelief to the importance of the truth at stake.

That the Scripture teaches levels of importance in truth is, I think, generally understood. However, we encounter two significant problems when we seek to identify what truths fit into which level. First, we do not all agree on what the truth is. We all know what the Bible says, but we do not agree about what it means.

In 1999, for example, Dr. David Shumate asked me to go with him to the Dominican Republic. I was to give a seminar in OT Theology at Iglesia Bautista Cristiana. Dave was then a professor at Bob Jones University, an associate pastor of a Baptist church in Greenville, SC, and a good friend of mine. However, he did not remember that I was a Wesleyan-Arminian until after he had purchased our plane tickets and all the arrangements were made. The morning after we arrived, before I started to teach, he sat down with me and told me that word had leaked out that I was an Arminian and a Methodist to boot (i.e., a heretic)! He wanted to know what I believed about eternal security and how that would impact what I was going to teach. I assured him that I was not there to evangelize my Baptist brothers to my point of view on eternal security. The subject would not even come up. With God's help, it took me about 5 days to win the confidence and respect of my Dominican Baptist brothers. It was a new thought for them that a Methodist could be a Christian!

The second problem we encounter when we seek to identify what truths fit into which level is this: if we *do* agree on what the Bible means, we often do not agree on its relative importance. A few years ago I was holding a weekend meeting in Michigan. After a session in which I explained the Biblical principles of adornment from 1 Peter 3 and 1 Timothy 2, an older lady told me the following story. When she was a child, her family took a vacation together. As they drove slowly through a certain town, she and her siblings spotted a group of women who were wearing dresses and appeared to have long hair. They pointed the women out to one another and decided they must be Christians. As they came closer, one of the children noticed that the women wore wedding bands. This discovery led the children to reverse their previous judgment and rather disappointedly conclude that in fact those women must not be Christians after all.

In both of these instances, well-intentioned believers elevated their interpretations of Scripture to the level of the Gospel and, as a result, concluded that those who

believed or practiced contrary to their beliefs could not be Christians. If this was an isolated problem, we could easily dismiss it as exceptional. Unfortunately, it infects virtually all of Christendom, and we are not immune to this disease. In order to effect a cure to this problem, we must change the way we think about the relative importance of our interpretations of Scripture. An uncompromising commitment to Scripture is not the same as an uncompromising commitment to our interpretations of Scripture. The supreme value of Scripture does not grant all our interpretations supreme importance. We need an evaluative grid that will guard us from the arrogance of autonomous, self-validating theology which thinks, "Everyone who agrees with me, my group, or the scholars I respect, is right. Everyone else is more or less heretical."

Categories of Interpretive Consensus

Historically, the criterion by the church has evaluated the relative importance of Scriptural truths has been consensus. By consensus I mean two things. First, consensus in the sense of being in harmony with the totality of divine revelation. Scripture must always be interpreted in harmony with itself. Second, consensus in the sense of Vincent of Lerins' fifth century description of orthodox faith: It is "what has everywhere, always, and by all been believed." Vincent's pithy formula expresses the reality that since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), there will be a discernible catholicity or universality in the interpretation of the most essential truths of Christianity.

Category 1: Fundamentals of Faith and Practice

Please look with me at the chart appended to this paper. In this chart, I have attempted to lay out the major categories of interpretive consensus that came into existence relatively early in the life of the Church and have continued until today. The most important truths of Christianity, those which a person must believe in order to be saved,⁴ are also the truths regarding whose interpretation the Christian Church has agreed upon throughout its history. These truths belong to Category 1. Wesley called such truths "the essentials."⁵ Today they are called "the fundamentals." They include,

⁴ The Scriptural directions for handling disbelief in the Gospel teach us that some truths are so important that a person must believe them to be saved. The converse is also true: there are some truths one cannot deny and be saved. For example, one need not know about and believe in the virgin birth in order to be saved. However, one cannot deny the virgin birth and its corollaries and truly believe in a sinless Jesus who was the God-Man.

⁵ "Let us keep close to the grand scriptural doctrines There are many doctrines of a less essential nature, with regard to which even the sincere children of God (such is the present weakness of human understanding) are and have been divided for many ages. In these we may think and let think; we may 'agree to disagree.' But, meantime, let us hold fast the essentials of 'the faith which was once delivered to the saints!'" *Sermon 53, III.1.*

As an interesting side note, the phrase "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things char-

for example, the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Jesus, his bodily resurrection, justification by faith alone in Christ alone, and the second coming. The locus of authority for these beliefs is identified on the chart by the line labeled "Phraseology." For Category 1, the authority is Scripture itself. We may say regarding these truths, "The Bible undeniably states ..." or "If language means anything, the Bible teaches"

In addition to the doctrines that are essential to salvation, there are certain actions one must practice to be a Christian (e.g., obedience to all known commands of Scripture) and actions one cannot practice and be a Christian (e.g., drunkenness, fornication, lying, etc.).

If one who professes to be Christian does not believe and practice these truths, the church has a responsibility to eject him from its communion and regard him as an unbeliever in need of salvation. On the other hand, if one does believe and practice these truths, we should regard him as a brother in Christ. If the Church Universal has not agreed that a given belief or practice reflects the whole counsel of God's word and is essential to salvation, we should not elevate it to that status.

Categories 2-4: The Adiaphora that Divide⁶

To Category 2 belong those beliefs and practices upon which there is broad agreement within given theological communities, but over which there is disagreement among well-informed, godly men who agree on Category 1 issues. Doctrinal examples include the various theological systems: Calvinist, Arminian, Wesleyan-Arminian, Lutheran, Anabaptist, and so on.⁷ Practical issues that flow from these doctrinal conclusions include such things as worship practices (the Eucharist, musical instruments), evangelistic methods (altar, public appeal), and views on war and violence (pacifism).

To Category 3 belong those beliefs and practices which form the nucleus of denominational and affiliational commitments. These may be doctrinal, for example, eschatology, church polity, the nature of sanctification; or they may be practical, for example, lifestyle issues, women in pastoral ministry, Sabbath/Lord's Day observance.⁸

ity," is often falsely attributed to St. Augustine. Philip Schaff notes that this worthy phrase was coined by Rupertus Meldenius, a Lutheran theologian, during the Thirty Years War of the 17th century. *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 650-653.

⁶ Adiaphora is the technical term in theology and ethics for matters regarding which belief or non-belief does not affect one's salvation.

⁷ I would place much of the debate over how the Old and New Covenants relate (classic dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism, covenantal approaches, theonomic approaches) in Category 2 Principles. Many of the life-related conclusions that flow from the previously mentioned systems belong to Category 2 Practices.

⁸ One point of interest to me is that there is often practical agreement between believers who belong to distinct, at times even, opposing theological and affiliational communities. For example, although I am a

The practical consequence of disagreement over Category 2 and 3 issues is that theological and affiliational communities are created within which closer fellowship is shared than is enjoyed between brothers of differing theological and affiliational commitments.

To Category 4 belong beliefs and practices that are unique to an individual and concerning which there is no consensus at even the local church level. These would include, for example, theological convictions regarding birth control and a person's preferred theological terminology (Filled with the Spirit vs. Entire Sanctification). Examples of practical convictions which vary widely even among those who agree on Category 3 practices would include child-rearing methods, acceptable forms of entertainment, use of media, reading fiction, and so on.

To remedy sectarianism, we must acknowledge that Scripture, and thus God Himself, requires for salvation a simple faith in Christ alone that walks in all the light it has, however small that light may be. We cannot regard as brothers in Christ those who reject Category 1 truths, but we must accept as brothers all whose beliefs and practices are in harmony with the consensually identified truths of Category 1. When it comes to Category 2 and 3 issues, there is no biblical mandate to separate from those who disagree with us.⁹ Rather, we are commanded to love and accept them, but "not to doubtful disputations" (Rom. 14:1). The commands to love and accept, however, do not necessitate ecumenical amalgamation. The formation of separate theological and affiliational communities need not be a violation of Jesus' prayer for unity among his followers.¹⁰ In fact, given the noetic effects of the Fall, it may be the best way to maintain

Wesleyan-Arminian by conviction, my understanding of the Sabbath/Lord's Day aligns me with many believers whose theological commitments are Reformed.

⁹ In 1986, H. E. Schmul addressed this issue at the IHC: "True unity is founded upon His Word. Conservative holiness people are agreed on fundamentals.... Fundamentals ... are the inerrancy of holy Scripture, deity of Christ, the atonement, bodily resurrection and second coming. These are primary truths and we are 100% agreed in proclaiming them.

"The error is defining *what* is spiritual and deciding *who* is spiritual based on the interpretation of secondary truth is instead of emphasizing our agreement on fundamentals. Wesleyans scholars, Wesley, Clarke, Fletcher, Ralston, Pope, Godbey, Breesee, Roberts, Wiley and others, do not share a common understanding of secondary truths, yet they are in full agreement on primary or fundamental truths.

"We face grave danger in elevating secondary truths to the level of primary truth and in judging one another's spirituality based on our understanding of these truths.

"A misunderstanding of the sacraments, water baptism, the second coming, the millennium, the conscientious objector or divorce and remarriage is not fatal. But a misunderstanding concerning the inerrancy of God's Word, deity of Jesus Christ, the vicarious atonement, the bodily resurrection, His second coming and triumph over all evil, is fatal. One cannot be truly Christian and deny these fundamental truths. Since we are 100% agree on the fundamentals, speak the truth in love on secondary issues." H. E. Schmul, "Crucible for Conservatives," pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ The unity for which Jesus prays is the consequence, not of ecumenical union, but of spiritual participation in the perichoretic union of the Father and Son—a union in which the Father indwells the Son and

the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love.¹¹ And that brings us to a third component of a proper interface between the outer and inner dimensions of our movement.

Soul Liberty: Applying Categories of Interpretive Consensus

Every believer will stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for himself (Rom. 14:10-12). God, through His grace, has given us the sacred privilege and solemn responsibility of maintaining a good conscience void of offense toward God and man. This is the “soul liberty” of which I speak.¹² Perhaps the most important consequence which flows from our possession of this liberty is that we cannot violate our consciences without sin (Rom. 14:23). Therefore, it does not matter to what category of interpretive consensus a doctrine or practice belongs; if we believe something is required of us, we must practice it. If we believe something is forbidden us, we cannot partake. To do otherwise is to sin.

On the other hand, our practice of soul liberty must be balanced by an awareness of categories of interpretive consensus. Soul liberty and Christian consensus serve as the twin ballasts of the church. Without soul liberty, we list into traditionalism or lowest-common denominator Christianity. Without Christian consensus we list into autonomous individualism or post-modern indeterminacy. Weighted properly, soul liberty and Christian consensus keep us aright.

I believe the following benefits flow from such a balance. First, we will grant to others the same freedom to search the Scriptures and seek understanding that we desire for ourselves. Such a posture does not frown at questions that challenge our consensus in Categories 2 and 3. Rather, it welcomes them as opportunities to expose our interpretations to the light of shared consideration of Scripture. Please do not misunderstand. The fact that there is not universal interpretive consensus on Categories 2 and 3 does not mean that our interpretive consensus is false. Neither does a lack of universal consensus on a given doctrine or practice mean that it is unimportant. We would be fools to believe what we knew was false. We should be as certain about what we believe as the data allows us to be. Nonetheless, we must also exercise charity toward others. We

the Son indwells the Father, and They indwell us and we indwell Them (John 17:21, 23). Our oneness is to be a reflection of the Father and Son’s oneness: a unity created by self-giving and other’s receiving love.

¹¹ The term “noetic” refers to the mind. Scripture highlights the Fall’s effects on our minds in Eph. 4:17-18 and 1 Cor. 2. Logically, all theological and exegetical positions cannot be correct. Although we are aware that the Fall has affected our minds, there is no sure way to remedy those effects and guarantee a wholly accurate understanding of truth. Hebrews 5:12ff indicate that having one’s senses exercises to discern good and evil and “going on to perfection” are crucial elements in developing the believer’s capacity to discern truth. However, infallibility does not appear to be possible this side of eternity.

¹² “Soul liberty” is, technically, a phrase coined by the Baptist Roger Williams who co-founded Rhode Island on the conviction that every person is given by God the right to live according to the dictates of his/her conscience.

should allow them to be as fully persuaded in their minds as we are in ours—even when they differ from us on Categories 2-4.

Second, we are enabled to recognize humbly our position with the Church Universal. Our particular affiliation is not “the church,” nor are we qualified to pronounce ourselves the best expression of God’s will for His people. Though we leave that judgment to God, we nonetheless passionately seek to live out our best understanding of all God’s will. Such humility will enable us to learn from others outside our tradition without abandoning the best insights of our own heritage.

Third, we are freed to embrace affiliational loyalty while rejecting sectarian insularity.¹³ In other words, we are empowered to embrace the “catholic spirit” which Wesley both advocated and practiced.

In his sermon delivered on the death of George Whitefield, Wesley writes:

Who is a man of a catholic spirit? One who loves as friends, as brethren in the Lord, as joint partakers of the present kingdom of heaven, and fellow-heirs of his eternal kingdom, all, of whatever opinion, mode of worship, or congregation, who believe in the Lord Jesus; who love God and man; who, rejoicing to please and fearing to offend God, are careful to abstain from evil, and zealous of good works. He is a man of a truly catholic spirit, who bears all these continually upon his heart; who, having an unspeakable tenderness for their persons, and an earnest desire of their welfare, does not cease to commend them to God in prayer, as well as to plead their cause before men; who speaks comfortably to them, and labors, by all his words, to strengthen their hands in God. He assists them to the uttermost of his power, in all things, spiritual and temporal; he is ready to “spend and be spent” for them; yea, “to lay down his life for his brethren.”¹⁴

Fourth, and crucial to our mission to spread holiness throughout the world, this balance frees us to modulate the terminology and emphases of our proclamation of holiness as we move throughout the larger body of Christ. For example, when we preach within our own circles, we may use our own theological terminology. But when we move in other theological and affiliational communities, we should preach Scripture’s truth in Scripture’s language. Every God-loving person will welcome the edification of Scripture’s call to holiness issued in the images and language of Scripture. In fact, if you weren’t aware of it, holiness is one of the hottest topics in Christian circles today. Books are being written on holiness from virtually every theological perspective.¹⁵ That can only mean that people are hungry for a vital relationship with God that

¹³ By insularity I mean an unwillingness to think, read, or listen outside of the bounds of one’s own tradition.

¹⁴ *Sermon 53*, III.7.

¹⁵ The following is a list of just a handful of books published on holiness by authors outside of Wesleyan-Arminian circles within the last few years: Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Holiness: The Heart God Purifies* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004); J. B. Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Henry T. Blackaby, *Holiness: God’s Plan For Fullness Of Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003); Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart: Discovering Personal Victory Through Holiness* (Sisters, Or. : Multnomah Publishers,

produces holiness of heart and life. Let us rise to this opportunity and share Scripture's glorious message of freedom from sin!

Thus far I have suggested various ways in which a recognition of levels of importance in truth, categories of interpretive consensus, and soul liberty may stimulate us to healthier relationships with believers of other theological and practical persuasions. In the remainder of this paper, I would like to turn our attention to how this paradigm may be useful in addressing the challenge of church membership.

Church Membership in the Balance

The churches within the Conservative Holiness Movement are currently in a crisis of church membership. On average, less than 35% of our attendees are church members. There appear to be two primary reasons for this crisis: 1) in most of our churches, membership is the gateway to leadership, and 2) membership's right to vote brings with it the potential to control who leads the church. In order to guard the direction and identity of our churches, we have set the hurdle to membership as high as our leadership standards. As a result, persons who want to be involved in the ministry of our churches, but who do not qualify for membership, generally move to another church where they can be involved.

There have been a number of divergent responses to this crisis. One response has been to maintain the membership standards at their current levels and regard the loss of those unwilling to commit to our distinctives as inevitable. Among those to whom such loss of willing workers is unacceptable, some have responded by altering, waiving, or otherwise ignoring their requirements for church membership in order to involve the willing. In these churches, their identity is gradually eroded and may be lost altogether. Others have been exploring what appears to be a middle way: some form of two-tiered membership that allows people to join the church without giving them access to positions of influence, which are reserved for those whose theological and practical commitments match the church's. It is this middle way I want to address.¹⁶

2003); Clyde Cranford, *Because We Love Him: Embracing A Life Of Holiness* (Sisters, OR : Multnomah Publishers, 2002); Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace: Delighting In The Joy That Is Our Strength* (Wheaton, Ill. : Crossway Books, 2001); John C. Haughey, *Housing Heaven's Fire: The Challenge Of Holiness* (Chicago: Jesuit Way, 2002); Constantine Cavarnos, *Holiness: Man's Supreme Destiny* (Belmont, Mass. : Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2001); Michael L. Brown, *Go and Sin No More: A Call To Holiness* (Ventura, CA: Renew, 1999); Ralph Martin, *Called to Holiness: What It Means To Encounter The Living God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999); Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996); Jonathan Edwards, *Pursuing Holiness In The Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2005).

¹⁶ The solution to our current crisis is multi-faceted. It involves moving our church membership, leadership, and discipleship structures into closer alignment with Scripture. Space and time permit me to address only church membership. Future Aldersgate Forums plan to take up the topics of our church leadership and discipleship structures.

The following sections delineate the evidence for church membership in the NT, argue that the NT criteria for church membership and church leadership roles are distinct, argue that discipleship not governance is the focus on NT church membership, and seek to apply categories of interpretive consensus to a two-tiered membership model as a potential remedy to our problem.

Church Membership: A Practical Necessity; A NT Practice

There was a time when I questioned not only the desirability but even the validity of church membership. I saw no basis in the NT for the kind of membership requirements which are common in our churches. As I read the NT, if a person trusted in Christ, publicly professed their faith in baptism, continued in the apostles' doctrine, and faithfully participated in corporate fellowship, they were a member of both the Church and the local church. It was as simple as that. Since most of the persons who attend our churches today meet these basic requirements, I saw no Biblical grounds for church membership as we know it. Two things changed my mind.

Church Discipline in America

The first was a study of the biblical principles for church discipline I did the late 90's. During the process of that study I heard a story about a local pastor who had been found molesting a 13 year old girl and was summarily dismissed from his church. Only the board members knew why he "resigned." And the board didn't tell the church down the road where he moved to pastor next. When I protested to the person telling me the story that the church's behavior was unbiblical, I was "shouted down" with pragmatic arguments about damaging the church's reputation and the fear of causing a ruckus or church-split.

That church violated both Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5:20. They sinned against the fallen pastor—he was not publicly rebuked and offered the opportunity to repent and seek the church's forgiveness, let alone the child and her family's forgiveness. They sinned against the church to which the pastor went next. How could any one think it is better to allow a child-molester to go unscathed to perpetrate his wickedness upon other unsuspecting believers than it is to risk stirring up a church ruckus in practicing biblical church discipline?! I am still outraged when I think about that story. It was an abomination.

Church discipline, as outlined in all its phases and levels in the NT,¹⁷ is God's immune system for the local church. Without church discipline, a church is like a person without an immune system. God designed the process of restorative discipline to

¹⁷ For a discussion of the bases, stages, and methods the Bible establishes for biblical confrontation of sin, see my online paper "Loving Others When They Sin" at <http://www.apbrown2.net/>.

serve as a rescue system to keep members of the Body from becoming so diseased that they must be amputated. Amputation is Scripture's *last* resort in seeking to restore the unrepentant. When it is a church's first or only resort, it is certainly a sign that they are not operating biblically. To refuse to practice church discipline is flagrant disobedience to our Lord Jesus Himself. To refuse to plan for church discipline is egregious irresponsibility.

When I realized that church discipline is not optional if I am going to obey Jesus, I began reading up on church discipline practices and principles. In the process, I was shocked to read stories like the following. A church in Colorado had an open-membership policy: if you come regularly and tithe, you're a member. A young woman, who was a part of the college & career group, decided to move in with her boyfriend. From her perspective, her moral behavior was none of the church's business.

That wasn't how the church saw it. Since she had been a regular "member," the church initiated the steps Jesus laid out in Matthew 18:15-17. First, her friends went to her, but she wouldn't listen. Then the church leadership went to her, explaining what the Bible says about fornication and Christians, but she wouldn't listen.

At this point, she decided that since she was being harassed by a bunch of legalists, she would just quit attending that church and go somewhere else. However, from the church's perspective, she was backsliding, and they had a responsibility to exercise the discipline Jesus prescribed to try to bring her back into right relationship with God. So, they took the third and fourth steps: they brought her case before the church, formally censured her in absentia, and declared her no longer a Christian or a member of the church.

She sued the church for libel and defamation, and the court awarded her in excess of \$150,000. The court's rationale: because she had never made any formal commitment to membership and had told the church leaders that she no longer considered herself a member of their church, the church did not have a legal right to discipline her.

This is not an isolated incident. Google "church discipline libel defamation," and you will find plenty of material that supports the conclusion that church discipline without formal membership is a lawsuit waiting to happen.¹⁸ That is the first reason that I found to change my mind about church membership.

¹⁸ Peacemakers Ministries, for example, has a webpage dedicated to "reducing your church's exposure to legal liability." See <http://bookstore.peacemaker.net/html/ris.htm>. Accessed 2/12/2007. See also, Clarence E. Hagglund and Britton D. Weimer, "Clergy malpractice: Protecting consumers or unconstitutional secular intrusion?" *FICC Quarterly* (Winter 2000) accessed online < http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3968/is_200001/ai_n8884548/pg_3 >

New Testament Church Discipline Required Church Membership

This past summer I discovered a second and more important reason. I teach a Young Adult SS class composed of young married couples and college-age singles. Almost none of the members of my class are members of the church and many of them expressed serious reservations about membership when I asked them about it. In response to their inquiries, I began a series of lessons designed to explore church membership from a biblical perspective. As I studied the NT, I became convinced that the NT church had membership requirements.¹⁹ There are at least four lines of evidence that I believe support this conclusion.

The first line of evidence is Matthew 18:15-17.²⁰ In this passage, Jesus assigns “the church” the responsibility of being the final court of appeal in the process of dealing with a brother who has sinned. It is inconceivable that just anyone who showed up for the local service would have the right and responsibility to participate in disciplining a believer who has sinned.

The second line of evidence is the responsibility of “the church” to excommunicate the unrepentant (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5) and restore from excommunication those who repent (2 Cor. 2).²¹ If the NT church had no form of church membership, how could it have practiced these commands?

The third line of evidence is the mutual accountability of believers and elders.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

¹⁹ A discussion of NT church membership in the context of church discipline by John Piper brought the following lines of evidence to my attention.

²⁰ Matthew 18:15-17 “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” All Scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 5:13 But those who are outside, God judges. “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

2 Corinthians 2:6-8 Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

These passages imply that there must have been some kind of commitment that existed between those who were submitting and those who were leading so that they could identify one another.

The final line of evidence comes from Paul's admonition to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. The first pastoral responsibility of elders is to "Be on guard ... for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). In order for an elder to know who "the flock" is, there must be a clearly defined and limited set of people.

The four lines of evidence sketched above have convinced me that the New Testament church, although without technical, legal formalities, had an established set of criteria by which one was defined as a member of "the church" or "the flock." The NT suggests that these criteria would have included public believer's baptism identifying with Christ, public profession of faith in Jesus as the Christ and Lord, dedicated participation in the life of the local church, and submission to the church's discipline, both formative and restorative (cf. Acts 2:42).²²

Church Membership: Not an Open Door to Church Leadership Roles

We do not have to have the NT church's complete list of requirements for membership in order to recognize that being a member of the NT church did not automatically qualify one for leadership roles. The qualifications for elders and deacons delineated in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 set a much higher standard for church leadership than was required for church membership.²³

A membership model that makes membership an automatic threshold to church leadership has not adequately considered the New Testament's distinction between the criteria for church membership and church leadership. Agreement with a church's (or denomination's) Category 3 doctrinal and practical consensus may be a necessary condition to enter church leadership roles, but it is not a sufficient condition. All NT church members were "full members," but not all members of NT churches were qualified to fill the leadership roles of deacon or elder. I believe a crucial step toward solving our membership problem is to return to the biblical pattern of distinguishing the criteria for church membership and church leadership. All persons filling roles equivalent to the biblical roles of deacon or elder should be required to meet the 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 qualifications.

²² Formative discipline includes spiritual accountability as well as submission to spiritual leaders' directions, admonitions, and warning. Restorative discipline encompasses the all the processes for dealing with brothers who have sinned (cf. Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2; 1 Thess. 3:6, 14-15).

²³ Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that the modern "ordained elder" was only a subset of the NT role of elders. The NT expects a plurality of elders within a local church, a subset of whom "labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17), yet all of these elders must meet the Scriptural qualifications.

NT Church Membership Focus: Discipleship not Governance

Another key step in dealing with our membership dilemma is to regain a biblical perspective on the responsibilities and privileges of NT church membership. Most conceptions of church membership focus on participatory rights and privileges afforded to members. The church is often conceived as a business entity and the membership makes decisions on how to run the business. Or the church is viewed as a club and membership is valued for its perks.

The biblical focus of church membership is discipleship not governance. Members of the NT church were to be equipped to do the work of the ministry and edification of the body (Eph. 4:11-13). In other words, they were to be engaged in disciple-making (Matt. 28:18-20). The process of disciple-making includes both being disciplined and discipling others. As a commitment to discipleship, church membership involves spiritual accountability and submission to the local church's spiritual leaders (Heb. 13:17), being trained in the Scripture's theological and practical truths (Heb. 5:12-6:3), and receiving and giving spiritual support and edification to fellow believers (Heb. 3:12-13; Col. 3:16). As church members mature in their own discipleship, they are then equipped to disciple others.

The NT gives the primary responsibility and authority for church governance or oversight to a plurality of elders. The responsibilities of church members appear to have been submission, evaluation, and confirmation. In terms of submission, the example of the elders in Acts 15, Hebrews 13:17, and Paul's directions to Titus suggest that church members are to learn from and submit to their spiritual authorities in matters of doctrine and practice. By evaluation, I mean that church members are responsible to help evaluate the character and life of those proposed as deacons and elders (Acts 6; 1 Tim. 3:2, 7) and to evaluate the quality of the oversight exercised by those offices (1 Tim. 5:17). By confirmation, I mean that in matters dealing with practical issues, such as the feeding of elderly widows, the NT elders brought their solution to the members and the members confirmed (or theoretically denied) the elders' judgment (Acts 6). In this way the under-shepherds do not act as lords over the flock, but act as examples to be followed (1 Pet. 5:1-3). They lead the flock just as the head and the body act in coordinated effort. The head directs with the body's cooperation. When we have helped our people to understand that the biblical focus of church membership is a commitment to discipleship not a right to governance, we will have made good progress toward solving our membership problem.²⁴

²⁴ An obstacle to regaining a biblical view of church membership as a commitment to discipleship and not the acquisition of the right to a vote in the direction and decisions of the local church is our American political culture. We are, in many places, stridently democratic. Rather than seeking to remove this obsta-

Categories of Interpretive Consensus and Two-Tiered Church Membership

Once we separate the criteria for church membership from those for church leadership and regain a biblical perspective on the discipleship focus of church membership, we must still face the initial problem I had with church membership: our standards for church membership are much higher than the New Testament's. Entrance into membership in the NT church was essentially belief and practice of Category 1 truths. Our standards for church membership currently require agreement with Category 3 doctrine and practice. I am not about to advocate that we abandon the Category 2 and 3 conclusions that we have reached and simply have Category 1 membership. We would lose our Category 3 identity in short order. So then, if church membership was a practice of the NT church and it is a practical necessity to operate in obedience to God's word regarding church discipline in America, how then can it be implemented?

In the rest of this paper I will lay out one possible model of church membership that might be useful in addressing these concerns. Right up front, however, allow me to issue two disclaimers. 1) I am not affirming or implying that a two-tiered model of church membership is the NT model. It clearly is not the NT model. However, we must do something to disciple people into spiritual maturity and commitment to the consensus that defines our churches. Our failure rate on this matter is far too high. 2) I am not unalterably committed to a two-tiered model of membership. I am open to alternative models that accomplish the objectives I have laid out. However, I would note that virtually everything I am proposing has been successfully implemented by churches or groups outside of our circles. These ideas are not new to me.

I envision a two-tiered model of membership in which Level 1 would be based on commitment to Category 1 doctrine and practice, thus reflecting the NT criteria for church membership and membership in the Body of Christ.²⁵ Level 2 membership would build on Level 1 commitment and require, in addition, commitment to a local church's or denomination's Category 2-3 doctrinal and practical consensus. The primary focus of both levels of membership would be on discipleship to equip the members to engage in the work of the ministry. Access to ministry leadership roles where the leader's life serves as a pattern of mature Christianity should be conditioned

cle, at present, a prudent course may be to circumvent it by creating a two-tiered structure of church membership as described below.

²⁵ I am deliberately using the generic terms Level 1 and Level 2 membership. I have not yet come up with descriptive labels that seem workable. I have considered options like associate and full membership. I don't like "full" because it suggests that the associate member is not completely accepted as a member yet. I welcome creative suggestions that would highlight the essential difference between the two levels of membership—spiritual maturity and agreement with the church's Categories 2 and 3 consensus.

upon being a Level 2 member and require, in addition, that the leader possess the biblical qualifications for deacons or elders.

The Nuts and Bolts of Level 1 Membership

This level involves commitment to discipleship, accountability, church discipline, and non-leadership ministry involvement. I suggest that the Level 1 membership commitment be renewed annually after an interview with the church leadership. An annual renewal policy would have several benefits. First, it implicitly communicates that Level 1 membership is not a stopping place. It is intended only as an intermediate stage on the way to doctrinal and practical maturity (Level 2 membership). Second, it gives room for soul liberty. If a person becomes convinced that the Category 2-3 doctrinal and practical consensus of the local church is not in harmony with Scripture, an annual membership renewal interview permits the leadership to determine this, clarify misunderstandings, admonish them, and if the conflict is irresolvable encourage them to pursue membership in a local church where they can whole-heartedly commit themselves. Third, if a person cannot honestly say that they are committed to continuing discipleship toward Level 2 membership, accountability, church discipline, or ministry involvement, an annual renewal requirement would automatically remove them from membership if they choose not to renew it. I would also suggest that the church constitution or membership covenant specify that members who are in the process of church discipline may not remove their membership through non-renewal until the disciplinary process has completed.

Prerequisites for Level 1 Membership. This level is open to all who

1. have a clear testimony of saving faith in Christ alone for salvation.
2. have participated in water baptism in confession of their faith in Christ.
3. have completed a membership class that introduces them to the basics of the Christian life and the substance of the responsibilities of local church members.

One of the topics this membership class should cover is an explanation of the categories of interpretive consensus. The candidates should understand how the church's levels of membership relate to these categories, and how the local church fits within the larger Body of Christ.²⁶

²⁶ An explanation of this concept might be worded like: "Our church is a local manifestation of the universal Body of Christ. As such Level 1 membership is available to those who are part of the Body of Christ and who are willing to submit to discipleship, accountability, church discipline, ministry involvement, and movement toward Level 2 membership. We have Level 1 membership because we recognize that all believers are part of the Body of Christ and should be trained to participate in its life. However, our mission is to disciple believers into God-loving holiness of heart and life. As a result of our understanding of the theological and practical teachings of Scripture we have a Level 2 membership that reflects our distinctive mission and understanding of Scripture. If at some point, you are no longer willing or able to commit to the pursuit of our understanding of what a mature Christian should believe and

4. are willing to commit themselves fully to the responsibilities of membership.

Commitments of Level 1 Membership. All Level 1 members commit themselves to

1. walk in all the light God gives them.
2. abstain from all sin and every appearance of evil.²⁷
3. progressive discipleship designed to move all members into spiritual maturity (Level 2 membership) and active ministries for which they are gifted.
4. pursue an understanding of the Categories 2-3 doctrines and practices of the local church for the purpose of obtaining Level 2 membership. This commitment indicates that Level 1 membership is intended to be temporary and transitional.
5. support the local ministry financially through tithing.
6. regular spiritual accountability to the church leadership.
7. submit to restorative church discipline to help them sustain their relationship with the Lord should they sin (Matt. 18:15-17) or be overtaken by sin (Gal. 6:1).
8. be involved in ministry within the local church.²⁸

Benefits of Level 1 Membership. All Level 1 members will receive

1. systematic discipleship designed to equip them for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-13)
2. regular spiritual oversight of their souls' development in Christlikeness as well as regular spiritual accountability to a pastoral shepherd (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28).²⁹
3. opportunity for regular participation in ministry that edifies the Body and contributes to the evangelism of the lost (Eph. 4:11-13).

practice, we encourage you to find a church where you can commit wholeheartedly to developing in Christian maturity.”

²⁷ A pastor who is trying out a two-tiered model of membership suggested that, given our culture, it may be necessary to spell out some of the sins which must be abstained from: e.g., abstain from addictive drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, and narcotics; avoid reading or viewing material with filthy language, violence, sex, nudity, or anti-Christian elements.

²⁸ Every believer has been gifted by God with one or more spiritual gifts for the benefit of the body of Christ. One of the core discipleship classes would be to teach believers what the Bible says about Spiritual gifts, have them evaluate their own spiritual gifts, and then give them opportunities to engage in ministries that exercise the gifts they have. Following a specified period of ministry involvement, they would have opportunity to reevaluate their own gifts and have those who oversee them in their ministry evaluate their giftedness as well. This permits the church to confirm and affirm in believers the gifts and graces that God has given them.

²⁹ There should be a basic set of accountability questions which all church members agree to submit to being asked by the elders of the church. Each member should have a set of the questions, and an elder should regularly (quarterly, if not monthly) meet with those members for whom he has spiritual responsibility and ask them these questions.

4. the protection of a caring body of believers who watch for the spiritual well-being of one another (Eph. 4:16).
5. an opportunity to respond to issues brought before the membership by the church leadership (Acts 6, 1 Cor. 12).

The Nuts and Bolts of Level 2 Membership

Level 2 membership involves a greater commitment to discipleship, accountability, church discipline, and is the prerequisite for consideration for leadership. Level 2 membership would also require either full agreement with or willing submission to the theological and practical consensus that defines the local church's affiliational consensus.

Prerequisites for Level 2 Membership. This level is open to all Level 1 members who have

1. moved successfully through the core discipleship classes. These should not be waived for long-time Christians. Most Christians have never been systematically disciplined. Movement through these classes will benefit them more than they expect. If they already know all the material, they should view the classes as training to teach the material to others.
2. completed an interview with the church leadership which is designed to verify the candidate's understanding of the key theological and practical distinctives which define the local church's affiliational consensus.

Commitments of Level 2 Membership. All Level 2 members affirm

1. their continued commitment to the Level 1 commitments.
2. their commitment to pursue the characteristics of mature believers outlined in Titus 2:1-10; 2 Peter 1:5-10; etc.
3. their agreement with essential Wesleyan-Arminian doctrine, including especially conditional election, universal intent of the atonement, the necessity of living above willful sin, and the vital importance of entire sanctification to living a holy life.³⁰
4. their commitment to essential Wesleyan-Arminian practices, including a whole-hearted pursuit of loving God and loving others that actively seeks to choose that which is most beneficial, edifying, and encouraging for themselves and others, and most conducive to the winning of the lost, a cheerful willingness to lay aside any practice or pursuit that does not contribute positively to their pursuit of loving God and living holy.

³⁰Since I am writing within a Wesleyan-Arminian context, I am assuming this doctrinal consensus. Those within another Category 2 theological consensus would simply substitute that consensus for the Wesleyan-Arminian consensus.

5. their agreement with or willing submission to the Category 3 interpretive conclusions regarding life-style as well as whatever prudential [practical but not Scripturally mandated] guidelines are thought best for the promotion of unity and holiness by the local church. These would include concerns for modesty, simplicity in adornment, gender-distinct clothing, honor of the church's headship structure in worship by women having long hair and men not having long hair, and so on.

Benefits of Level 2 Membership. In addition to the benefits of Level 1 membership, all Level 2 members will

1. be potential candidates for the roles of deacons and elders, provided that they meet the character- and life-related qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and that they have completed the sequence of discipleship classes that are prerequisite to functioning in these roles.
2. receive advanced discipleship classes designed to equip them for lay leadership roles within the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-13), specifically training to equip them to be disciple-makers.³¹

Benefits of a Two-Tiered Church Membership Model

The two-tiered model just described would provide a number of significant benefits to the churches of the CHM. First, it would lift the Scriptural standards for leadership up before our church membership. Upholding these standards will challenge all of us to consider our lives and pursue holiness of heart and life more fervently. Second, such a model would provide a bridge across which people can move as they are enlightened by the Spirit and disciplined by the church into full conformity with our best understanding of the theological and practical requirements of Scripture. Third, this model admits into the local church those who are members of Christ's Body and receives them into its nurturing fellowship without compromising its commitment to its Categories 2-3 consensus. Fourth, this model enables a church to highlight its distinctive theological and practical commitments within an explanatory discipleship setting that permits people to learn through question and answer, rather than requiring them to unquestioningly accept the pronouncements of the pulpit. Current research indicates that the churches which are growing the most and are spiritually healthiest are churches that emphasize their theological distinctives and have high expectations for

³¹ By "lay leadership roles" I am thinking of functions such as small group bible study leaders, witnessing team leaders, nursing home ministry leaders, bus ministry captains, etc. These leadership roles do not seem to me to rise to the oversight level of the office of elder.

their members.³² The idea that we attract committed people by minimizing our distinctives and expecting little is bogus.

Opportunities for Development

Implementing a model such as the one I have described will require us to address some of our short comings. Every pastor within the CHM who is serious about seeing new converts grow into spiritual maturity has encountered the frustrating dearth of relevant discipleship material. The problem is not that there is not discipleship material available. The problem is that much of it is shallow theologically, and little if any of it reflects our theological and practical consensus. There is a great need for quality discipleship material. Who is willing to join a working group to face this challenge? One person is too small a committee to address this need. We need volunteers who can research,³³ write, edit, and provide theological and practical oversight. Written material, however, will not be sufficient. We need persons with web skills who can help us deliver these materials online. We need persons with presentational skills to help us deliver this material on CDs, DVDs, and streaming video. The world surrounds and inundates us with its messages. We are fooling ourselves if we think that a couple hours of spiritual discipleship per week will be adequate to counteract and reverse the world's brainwashing program.

Conclusion

I have suggested that an understanding of how levels of truth, categories of interpretive consensus, and soul liberty interrelate is indispensable if we are to be successful in spreading Scriptural holiness around the world. In relation to church membership, regardless of the specific structures used, I have argued that the criteria for church membership and church leadership must be distinct, and that the focus of church membership should be a commitment to discipleship, not an gateway to governance.

The prescribed course of treatment may appear daunting, but I for one am hopeful that we are not so far gone that we cannot rally ourselves to appropriate God's grace to meet the need of our hour. God wants us to know experientially the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe (Eph. 1:19-20). There are no limits to what God wants to do and can through us when we are humbly and wholly submitted to His

³² Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret For Keeping People In Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works, And What Doesn't* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996).

³³ We do not need to recreate the discipleship wheel from scratch. In addition to the resources that are available today, our own Methodist heritage is rich with forgotten resources waiting to be rediscovered, retooled, and deployed again in this ageless task.

control. Thank you for the honor of sharing this paper with you. I pray God will use it for His glory and the good of His kingdom.

CATEGORIES OF INTERPRETIVE CONSENSUS REGARDING SCRIPTURAL TRUTH

	Category 1 The Fundamentals	Category 2 Theological Distinctives	Category 3 Affiliational Distinctives	Category 4 Personal Convictions
Checkpoint	Consensual conclusions of the Christian Church	Consensual conclusions of one's theological community	Affiliational consensus of denomination / local church	Lack of consensus at local church level
Phraseology	The Bible undeniably states ... If language means anything, the Bible teaches ...	This theological community interprets / understands the Bible to teach or require ...	This affiliational community interprets / understands the Bible to teach ...	In my opinion ... I feel I should ...
Doctrine Principles Beliefs Teachings	Truths one must believe and truths one cannot deny and be saved = Orthodoxy. Inspiration of Scripture, Justification by faith alone in Christ alone, the bodily resurrection of Christ; the deity of Christ	Firmly held theological conclusions. Well-informed, godly men who agree on category 1 issues, disagree on these issues. Calvinism vs. Arminianism, Wesleyan vs. Non-Wesleyan	Principles over which there is widespread disagreement even among those who agree on category 2 principles. Eschatology, church polity, nature of sanctification.	Opinions, beliefs, or convictions about which there is no affiliational consensus (Tit. 3:9). Preferred theological terminology.
Response required by Scripture for disbelief	Range includes avoidance (Rom. 16:17-18), excommunication (1 Co.), total shunning (2 Jn), opposition (1 Ti.), denunciation (Gal.) <u>Separation passages:</u> Gal.1:8-9 2 John 1:9-11 1 Tim. 6:20-21	Accept and love them Rebuke factious or divisive persons and reject the unrepentant (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). Practically disbelief creates theological communities within which closer fellowship is shared than in category 1.	Accept and love them. Rebuke factious or divisive persons and reject the unrepentant (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). Practically disbelief creates affiliational communities within which closer fellowship is shared than in category 2.	Accept and love them. Rebuke factious or divisive persons and reject the unrepentant (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). Disbelief should be no barrier to fellowship (Rom. 14).
Practice Actions Applications of principles	Actions one must engage in to be saved and actions one cannot practice and be saved = Orthopraxy. Obedience to Scripture; keeping a clear conscience; Scriptural sin lists.	Well-informed, godly men who agree on category 1 <i>and</i> 2 principles disagree regarding these practices. Worship practices, Evangelistic methods, Views on war and violence.	Practices over which there is widespread disagreement even among those who would agree on category 2 practices. Lifestyle issues, women in pastoral ministry, Sabbath observance.	Personal practices and convictions. There is no general consensus on this issue. Child-rearing methods, forms of entertainment.
Response required by Scripture to disobedience	Range includes shunning & admonishment (2 Th.), avoidance (2 Ti., Rom.), rejection (Tit.), and excommunication (Mt., 1 Co.) <u>Separation passages:</u> 2 Tim. 3:2-5; Titus 3:10-11 Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:9-14 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:15-17	Accept and love them. Rebuke factious or divisive persons and reject the unrepentant (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). Practically non-adherence creates distinctions within theological communities, and may result in affiliational subdivisions within a theological community.	Accept and love them. Rebuke factious or divisive persons and reject the unrepentant (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). Practically non-adherence creates distinctions within affiliational communities and may impart a distinctive character to churches within an affiliation.	Accept and love them. Rebuke factious or divisive persons and reject the unrepentant (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). Practically non-adherence should not be a barrier to fellowship. Should not create further distinctions (Rom. 14).