



**Growing into Church Discipline Pt 6:
A Sinning Brother, Lying in Church, and the Fear of God**
August 13, 2023

Holy Text: Revelation 1:9-20

The Revelation of Jesus Christ was given by an angelic messenger to the apostle John. (Rev 1:1) The goal of this epistle was “to shew unto his (Christ’s) servants things which must shortly come to pass.”

It is a book filled with the splendor and majesty of God, great and terrible images, prophetic hyperbole, fantastic metaphors, similes, and Old Testament types imaged as New Testament anti-types.

Because of its eschatological implications, much of Revelation is considered hard to interpret. Even the general date of its writing is in dispute! Indeed, there are rigorous debates between different systems of eschatological thought between faithful Christians.¹²

And although the broader scope of the book is beyond our intent for today, we believe God’s people would not be afraid to read Revelation. Its Christology and Gospel are rich, its heavenly scenes are instructive for our humility and worship, and its final focus deeply encouraging!

Revelation 1:5-8 (KJV) *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. 8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

Revelation 4:8-11 (KJV) *And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. 9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

Revelation 21:1-8 (KJV) *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying,*

¹ <https://www.logos.com/grow/what-is-eschatology/>

² <https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/mill.cfm>

neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Revelation 1:9-20

Although much can be said about today's Text, points relevant to this series are below.

1. Christ is the Alpha and Omega...First and Last. This is a statement concerning His supreme authority. (vv.11, 17)
2. Christ knows and cares about His churches. He knows them by name. (v.11)
3. Christ holds the *angels of the churches*³ in His right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword flows from His mouth. (vv. 16, 20)
4. Christ dwells in the midst of the churches (seven candlesticks, vv.13, 20)! He sees all, knows all, and cares about all that occurs!
5. Christ is (and must be) glorious in the midst of His churches! (v.16) This is best demonstrated by a loving, obedient church.

Christ says to Ephesus, the first of the Seven:

Revelation 2:4 (KJV) Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

In the opening chapters of Revelation, Jesus set about correcting His church. If it be God's will, we will return to Revelation in a few weeks after surveying the NT passages that instruct us concerning discipline in the church.

A Sinning Brother (Matthew 18:15-17)

Matthew 18 contains the first NT instructions on conflict resolution and church discipline. As we said when we taught through this passage in Dec, 2021⁴:

- There are Two Assumptions in the Text: 1) Conflicts will occur between brethren, 2) Jesus wants His children to reconcile!
- There is a Vision in the Text: Jesus desires a unified church!
- There is at Reason for the Text: Jesus loves our unity and moves powerfully therein!
- There is a Path of Resolution in the Text: Jesus gives us real, applicable commands/precepts to follow! There are real world blessings that follow obedience!

1. A few thoughts on verse 15:

³ Each church was addressed through their "angel," a word that can mean an angelic being but can also mean "a messenger." Since angelic beings do not lead the church nor can they ensure the sort of correction the LORD insists upon in these chapters, I agree with John MacArthur, John Gill, Matthew Henry and others that the "angel" in question would be the "pastor" or most prominent elder.

⁴ <https://calvaryreformationchurch.org/sermons/2021/12/jesus-on-family-relationships-and-possessions-pt-1-biblical-conflict-resolution>

- Jesus is referring to a form of conflict that has arisen wherein a sin has been committed. Please note this is VERY different from a “non-sin” dispute.
 - Important: Things like differences of opinion or small, unintentional sleights are NOT in view. What is in view is an actual trespass...a biblically-defined sin.
 - Implicit in the Text (and in Christian relationships in general) is the idea that we should not “sweat the small stuff!”
 - In other words, Christian relationships should be so strong and enduring, that something must be on the “sin-level” in order to disrupt them!
 - The first step in the process Biblical Conflict Resolution is direct communication with the offender. Jesus commands a conversation between the two parties ONLY, FOR THE PURPOSE of reconciliation/resolution! The goal is to “gain your brother,” or to restore the relationship to what it was before!
2. Christ teaches in verse 16 that if the personal conversation fails, the offended party must take two or three people with them in order to hopefully convince the sinning brother/sister to repent. This is the second step. What persistence for the offender’s and the relationship’s sake!
 3. Christ teaches in verse 17 that if the second step in the process fails, the third is to involve one’s local church. Note the assumptions:
 - That the Christian parties are members of a local church.
 - That the Christian parties understand the authority given to the local church.
 - That the Christian parties will abide by the decision of the local church.

Some question whether “church” means just pastors/elders or the whole church, as in public discipline. We’ll see that there is a place for public discipline. We believe however, in the *principle of the lowest level* before escalation:

- First, seek the assistance of a Deacon or a Pastor.
 - Then, if there is no resolution, the matter goes before the gathered local assembly via possible congregational intervention or...
4. Excommunication, the last step. If there is no repentance, the language of verse 17 seems to indicate expulsion. MacArthur writes:

If he still refuses to repent, step three requires that the matter be reported to the whole assembly (verse Mat 18:17) so that all may lovingly pursue the sinning brother's reconciliation. But failing that, step four means that the offender must be excommunicated, regarded by the church as "a heathen and a tax collector" (see note on Mat 5:46). The idea is not merely to punish the offender, or to shun him completely, but to remove him as a detrimental influence from the fellowship of the church, and then to regard him as an evangelistic prospect rather than as a brother. Ultimately, the sin for which he is excommunicated is a hard-hearted impenitence.

William Macdonald writes:

If the defendant refuses to admit his wrong before the church, then he is to be considered a heathen and a tax collector. The most obvious meaning of this expression is that he should be looked upon as being outside the sphere of the church. Though he may be a

true believer, he is not living as one, and should therefore be treated accordingly. Though still in the universal church, he should be barred from the privileges of the local church. Such discipline is a serious action; it temporarily delivers a believer to the power of Satan “for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1Co 5:5). The purpose of this is to bring him to his senses and cause him to confess his sin. Until that point is reached, believers should treat him courteously but should also show by their attitude that they do not condone his sin and cannot have fellowship with him as a fellow believer. The assembly should be prompt to receive him back as soon as there is evidence of godly repentance.

5. Some might look at this and say, “This isn’t excommunication. The offended person would simply discontinue the friendship and keep it moving.” We’d respond contextually. From verses 1-3 of Matthew 18, Jesus is talking to and teaching the disciples, the very apostles who, along with Himself, are the foundation of the local church. For the apostles to treat someone as a heathen is to remove them from fellowship. Also, the follow-on verses refer to the authority of Christ’s Church render discipline:

Matthew 18:18-20 (KJV) *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

Charles Spurgeon said:

For practical purposes the people of God would need discipline, and the power to receive, retain, or exclude members. Of these keys our Lord says to Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Foremost among the apostles, Peter used those keys at Pentecost, when he let three thousand into the church; in Jerusalem, when he shut out Ananias and Sapphira; and at the house of Cornelius, when he admitted the Gentiles. Our Lord committed to his church power to rule within herself for him; not to set up doors, but to open or shut them: not to make laws, but to obey them and see them obeyed. Peter, and those for whom he spoke, became the stewards of the Lord Jesus in the church, and their acts were endorsed by their Lord.

In week one, looking at Matthew 16:13-19, we said:

Through the apostles, the church has been given the authority to gather the LORD’s people, preach the Bible, receive and excommunicate members, and administer the ordinances of grace among other important duties.

This four step process is the basis for church discipline. More detail to come.

Lying in the Church (Acts 5:1-10)

The Church of Jesus is very young in this Text. Most timelines put this incident either within the same year as Pentecost in Acts 2 (30AD) to around 35AD.

What happened? Both Ananias and His wife, presumably members of the church at Jerusalem, decided to sell a piece of property to give to the support of the church. However, after the sale was made, they decided to keep some of the money! They did not disclose this, and pretended all the money was given.

They joined together to lie to the church, which from Peter's perspective was to lie to the Holy Spirit...to God (vv3-4; 9). Please also note that Peter assigns partial responsibility to the activity of Satan (v.3), whose influence cannot be tolerated within Christ's holy church.

God's Discipline: God killed this lying couple. There is no way around this uncomfortable truth. Please note that God did not kill them because of adultery, or murder, or setting up a graven image, or any other so called "serious sin." He killed them for lying...for bearing false witness, a violation of the 9th Commandment.

To many people, this whole incident seems harsh. It's too Old Testament! Nevertheless, it was the will of God.

The Need for Fear of the LORD within the Church (Acts 5:11, 9:31, 19:17)

1. First, what is the fear of the LORD?

The fear of the Lord is the love, reverence, awe and passion that prompt the believer to obey God. It is that state of mental and emotional sanctification where the believer sees God as holy and a reverent trembling results. It is the necessary characteristic of Christian discipleship where total obedience to the commands of Christ is seen as a loving response to a loving God.

It is a behavioral restraining element even in the heart of those who do not follow Christ. In other words, it is a cultural acknowledgment within man's conscience of the Law of God (Ro 2:15). It is a necessary component of any Godly and moral society.

It is the understanding that God will one day judge the earth and all who ever lived.

2. The Scriptures are packed with the command to and benefits of fearing God:

Psalms 19:7-11 (KJV) *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.*

Proverbs 1:7 (KJV) *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Proverbs 9:10-12 (KJV) *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. 11 For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. 12 If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (KJV) Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. **14** For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

2 Corinthians 7:1 (KJV) Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Ephesians 5:21 (KJV) Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

3. After God's severe (and thankfully, atypical) chastisement and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, "fear" fell upon the churches:

Acts 5:11 (KJV) And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

4. The word for fear in Greek is *phobos*. It means "that which strike terror." (Thayer) In this case, there is a bit more than "reverence" in play. God's people were literally afraid to cross Him. This is the New Testament! Under the power of the Holy Ghost! Shocking?
5. Why did God do this? We don't fully know His mind, but here are a few thoughts:
 - **The Holiness of God.** The King would be hallowed and honored among His people, just as in the Old Testament.
 - **The "How much more" NT Principle.** Jesus said, "Ye have heard it was said of them of old time...But I say unto you..." (Matt 5:27-28). He often raised (not lowered) the standard in the New Covenant! How much more should the church obey given the greatness of the revelation of Christ and His Gospel?
 - **A Harrowing Precedent for the Church.** The King would not easily tolerate lawbreaking in His fledgling church. There would much love and grace, but the Church must still conduct herself within God's standards.
6. This early lesson turned out for their good. After the church in Jerusalem vetted Saul (Paul) this is what the Scripture says:

Acts 9:31 (KJV) Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Of note, rest, edification, comfort, and multiplication (things we all desperately want) were grouped with "the fear of the LORD!"

Also, remember this chilling incident?

Acts 19:11-20 (KJV) And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: **12** So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. **13** Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the

name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. **14** And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. **15** And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? **16** And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. **17** And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. **18** And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. **19** Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. **20** So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

The reality and vicious nature of spiritual warfare was enough to cause the fear of the LORD to again be manifest in the church! As a result, the name of Jesus was magnified, people confessed their sins, and “A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars.” (NLT)

Final encouragement for today:

Beloved, Christ loves His Bride. Amazingly, He is in the midst of our assemblies. He cares about our connection and unity and has issued precept on how to remain so. He said through the apostle:

Ephesians 4:1-3 (KJV) *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, **2** With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; **3** Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

God also cares about His own holiness, honor and His Laws. Grace is not excuse to commit sin:

Romans 6:1-2 (KJV) *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? **2** God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*

His loving discipline is integral to the health of His local body. May we read and heed.

Amen.