

God's Relationship Primer
by Dave Leach
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This book is posted on a wiki website where *you* can improve it with corrections, clarifications, relevant Scripture, and ideas.

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The original, much shorter version of this study was published at ipatriot.com [<http://ipatriot.com/gods-rules-fellowship-discussions/>] on Thanksgiving Day, 2017.

**Inspired by the challenges of 15 years of
managing televised Biblical/political
discussions (on The Uncle Ed. Show),
25 years of editing an interactive
periodical (The Prayer & Action News),
and 50 years of marriage**

Introduction

The more people want to accomplish together, the more they need rules to govern their communication, whether they number 200 million or 2. Where rules are not articulated, but are assumed by some while assumed differently by others, or are not thought about until divisions grow, relationships flounder. Idealistic hope and good intentions are crushed into disappointment, resentment, and even hostility.

Young couples imagine strong happy marriages require no more mental preparation than a love emotion barely distinguishable from sexual attraction. The Beatles' movie, "Yellow Submarine", imagines healing all society's sickness with love balloons. Humans are more complicated than that.

People act as if they have never heard of a handbook of relationship rules for marriage, friendship, and politics. But a Book in most homes has enough wisdom and love to save our marriages, friendships, nation, world, and churches.

"Friends" is what we call relationships whose assumed unwritten rules turn out to be compatible. But whole groups of people can work together as harmoniously as friends, to the extent they discuss, think about, understand, and agree upon which rules they want to govern their interaction.

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Group rules are no new idea. Robert's Rules of Order can keep medium sized meetings orderly and democratic even with ornery people present. God's relationship principles aim beyond orderly and democratic, all the way to respectful, productive, wise, successful, and bathed in love and humility – even when people disagree! And disagree about God!

God's Relationship Primer is not a complete list of God's rules for relationships. The whole 1200 page Bible is about human relationships with each other and with God;

150 pages is a little short to expect a complete list. But human discussion can draw attention to verses about discussion that haven't been applied to discussion for generations, and to how examples given in the Bible of topics of discussion which were common then logically apply to topics common today.

God's principles are worth discussing. This book's goal is to spread the discussion. It is posted on a wiki website where *you* can improve it with corrections, clarifications, relevant Scripture, and ideas. (See link on first page.)

The emphasis of this book

Although God's principles are designed to heal all human relationships, this study began as a search for rules to help medium size groups strategizing which mountains of evil they are ready to pull down together.

The concept is simple: when people meet, they should collaborate about how they are going to accomplish "good works" together, Titus 3:8-9, and not squander time on talk that produces only words. Proverbs 14:23. When disagreement hinders cooperation, people need to reason with each other to resolve differences, while practicing love and mutual respect. Doing this will turn meetings into not only beacons of Light in the deepest Darkness, but into laboratories of relationship skills able to heal other human relationships.

Meetings with these goals will have some of the features of secular meetings and some of churches.

They will be like churches in that to the extent they are serious about succeeding, they will acknowledge God as the source of wisdom and success – which secular groups avoid.

They will be like secular meetings in that their goal of shining as beacons of Light in the deepest Darkness is not generally welcome in church, since "politics" is suppressed in most churches because it is "controversial", even though the deepest Darkness is generally entangled with government. (For example, which is darker, saying the wrong words

during baptism, or killing your baby? Holding your primary worship service on the wrong day of the week [Saturday v. Sunday], or voting to let men into your daughters' public restrooms?)

As for strategizing which mountains of evil to pull down together, group strategizing in preparation for group action is common in secular groups but rare in church, where no discussion takes place in primary meetings, and discussion seldom has action for its goal in secondary meetings.

But a grasp of evil is clearer in church where Scripture is allowed to highlight it, than in secular meetings – even in secular meetings dominated by Christian activists – where quoting Scripture leaves people nervously trying to decide whether to applaud bravery or step away from fanaticism.

Giving Credit (Glory) to God

In “secular” groups, not even Christian majorities will credit relevant verses for their moral authority and common sense lest an unbelieving member become “offended” at the sound of wisdom that wholesome. Obviously that limits a group’s vision of good, and a group’s prospects for success.

Bible believers will help such groups by pressing for Freedom of Speech of all to appeal to the highest principles they know to persuade and to guide. Wherever Bible believers meet, they want to follow God’s meeting guidelines.

God’s rules welcome everybody, demand equal rights for everybody, and a voice for everybody. God’s strategy is to get everybody into a forum where wisdom, truth, and evidence can work. But not everybody welcomes God, wisdom, truth, or evidence. And to the extent people do not welcome God, they do not support equal rights or freedom of speech for anybody who disagrees with them. Hell’s strategy is censorship.

Not that participation should be subject to anything like a “doctrinal test” (statements one must profess to believe as a condition of participation). That is a clumsy measure of the usefulness of one’s participation, we know from everyday

experience, and because professors of other religions overlap, in Biblically defined “righteousness”, that of professing Christians (according to Romans 2 and Matthew 21:28-31).

But human thought is *influenced* by, if not perfectly consonant with, the religion, philosophy, and values we profess. So to the extent people profess other moral systems, God’s rules will make no sense and will not have their support.

It is a measure of the degree to which the character of America is that of “a Christian nation”, that to a large degree, even Communists, Hindus, Moslems, pagans, and devil worshippers who are U.S. citizens live by the uniquely Christian values of love (measured by readiness to serve others sacrificially), peace, wisdom, and the equal worth of all human beings (which in turn requires equal rights and freedom of speech for all). Although commitment to these values is *generally* weaker among those hostile to God.

These values are central Bible teachings. They are mocked and mistaken for weakness, insurrection, and blasphemy outside the protection of Biblical influence, such as under Communism or Islam. Hinduism’s *Gita* calls war the “duty” of the warrior caste, and while *Biblical* meditation is on the Word of God for the purpose of acquiring wisdom, *Hindu* meditation has for its purpose *removing* rational thoughts, desires, and goals from one’s mind.

So it is critical that Bible believers exert their influence to move their groups towards crediting God as the source of wisdom in identifying evil, success in overcoming evil, and the happiness of those pulling down evil together. Because to the extent God’s people hesitate to mention their Foundation for values like love, peace, wisdom, and equal rights, that self censorship will make these values easier targets for those who think them too “Western” or “religious”.

Yet it is just as critical that those opposed to God and His values, who are willing to join the forum and follow its rules, not be excluded or censored. (1) They articulate errors we need to understand. (2) They let us test our responses to

errors, which must be solid before we can persuade those outside who are less patient. (3) Drawing in those who disagree is part of the Mountain we are pulling. And (4) Often we are the ones who are wrong, in which cases people who disagree with us may be the ones best able to correct us.

Simple Discussion Rules

make up the Table of Contents

The Table Of Contents (TOC) lists the headings of each section. The headings are designed to double as *simple discussion rules which discussion participants can understand even without reading beyond this TOC.*

Those who read beyond the TOC will find text boxes after each heading containing God's Guidelines (Scriptures) upon which the rule is based, followed by discussion and application of them by mere humans – *hopefully, including you.*

Yes, *you* can propose corrections, clarifications, or additions which will be incorporated and addressed in future editions of this paperback, by interacting on a wiki website where this book is posted. See the link on page one.

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Part 1:

“Let all things be done decently and in Order” 1 Cor 14:40

1a Discussing Relevant

Scriptures must be allowed

At the loss of their own effectiveness, do Christian activists restrain each other from publicly revealing the Scriptures which are often the real reasons for their political positions. At the expense of policies which achieve the good intended, are Christian politicians ashamed to openly shape their legislative agendas around Bible discussions.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

Nonbelievers are welcome in Christian assemblies, says 1 Corinthians 14:24, and they are not required to glorify or

acknowledge God; Christianity is not a “religion of the sword”, in which belief is enforced by law or force. And even pagans, working *against* God, can accomplish incredible things, up until the point where God intervenes and stops them. Genesis 11:6. But to really succeed in doing great things which achieve the good intended and not the harm unintended, bringing satisfaction and fulfillment and blessing to all, requires cooperation with God, and acknowledgment of God.

1b Why discussing Scripture is essential to success

Proverbs 16:3 (BBE) Put your works into the hands of the Lord, and your purposes will be made certain. (CEV) Share your plans with the LORD, and you will succeed. (ERV) Turn to the LORD for help in everything you do, and you will be successful.

Psalms 37:3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. 4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. 6 And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

Luke 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

Logic suggests these reasons why doing great things requires cooperation with God, acknowledgment of God, and discussion of Scripture to guide group goals:

1. Being publicly on record as “marching” with God makes us more careful about our own words and behavior, because a very high standard inspires us, and because others will help hold us to that high standard and bring to our attention every deviation.

2. Meditation on the ways of God makes us sensitive to goals higher and better than we could have ever imagined

otherwise.

3. God is able to speak to us, through our thoughts, our reasoning, and the everyday revelations we experience, only to the extent we are listening, and *want* God's wonderfully difficult adventurous advice.

4. Only trust in God to actually help us through impassible obstacles allows us to go after great causes, going where no human support takes us, not fearing the risks we must take for which others call us irresponsible.

5. Assuming our goal is to do good, and bring down evil, publicly giving God credit for inspiring and helping mankind do good is a greater good than any specific "good work" we can do. For example, our parade float, a 1/5 scale replica of the Mayflower which sailed 400 years ago, 1620, says on its sides, "They got freedom of speech and religion, and a vote for all, from the Bible." How much more glorious it is, than "merely" working in Congress and courts to preserve these wonderful freedoms, to shout to the world that the inspiration for these freedoms in the first place was the Bible studies of the Pilgrims!

6. There is nothing more personally satisfying and fulfilling than love, and we can feel no greater love than when reflecting on all that God has done for us, and sharing our joy with others.

7. Our march against evil must, to be seriously effective, continue long after the evil has stopped troubling ourselves personally, after which the only rational motive for continuing our march is our love for others still oppressed by the evil. Our service to others, alongside God whose passion is likewise for ourselves and others and not for Himself, is an anchor of love which can carry us through Hell on earth undamaged, offering us Heaven on earth, and finally carrying us to Heaven in Heaven.

All in our assemblies are welcome to be as persuasive as they can be for their arguments or projects, appealing to the highest principles they know. Even Atheists, Moslems, Hindus, homosexuals. But they must not censor the ability of

Christians to appeal likewise to their Bibles. All who believe they have Truth to offer must be free to offer it, without fear that well-articulated truth might be overpowered by absurdity, and without resenting the loss of any absurdity remaining within ourselves under the spotlight of Truths presented by others. This is the example Paul left us, of “reasoning” with those who disagreed.

1c The Bible offers keys to success, relationship skills, and moral authority

Any group whose goals are freedom, fair laws, equal rights, and an end to violence is foolish to avoid studying together the original, most comprehensive, and certainly the most authoritative source of these values. The Bible is where we find reason and truth the ultimate weapons against evil, with freedom, equal rights, service, peace, and love our goals.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; ...

Acts 17:2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

Luke 2:46 And it came to pass three days after, that they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions: 47 And all that heard him, were astonished [astonished] at his understanding and answers.

1 Peter 3:15 But dedicate your lives to Christ as Lord. Always be ready to defend your confidence in God when anyone asks you to explain it. However, make your defense with gentleness and respect. (GW translation)

God begs us to reason together, which was Paul's "manner", or way of presenting the Gospel. It was how Jesus began His ministry at age 12, and it is the manner in which

God presents the Four Gospels: out of the 146 situations in which Jesus taught in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, only 20 – 1/7th – were *not* verbal interaction with others. And Jesus never censored, or discouraged, verbal interaction.

No other religion or philosophy, except to the extent it was influenced by the Bible, even believes there is such a thing as “Truth”, or that it is virtuous to grasp it and articulate it even at great personal cost, or that it is evil to censor or punish someone for stating the truth as accurately as he knows how.

Nor does any other religion, uninfluenced by the Bible, honor sacrificial service to others, motivated by love. Nor does any other religion honor love as Jesus defines it: “Greater love hath no man, than that he lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13. Nor does any other religion urge people to reach their goals to the skies to pull down those mountains of evil. Matthew 21:21.

Therefore it is a foolish following after failure for Christians who want to succeed in great good to be timid about clarifying how bright their “light” is compared to other religions which teach that there is no “truth”, that it is dumb to help others when that doesn’t benefit you, that freedom hinders progress, that power over others is superior to justice, and that there is no God ready to help men do good. Really dumb, to cover our light so it doesn’t shine any more brightly than the darkness of religions and philosophies of failure, in order to be polite.

God must not be censored, by any Christian who wants good.

1d Rules should keep meetings not just orderly and fair, but productive, sensible and friendly

Robert's Rules of Order can keep meetings orderly and fair, giving a reasonably equal voice to all, even with ornery people present. Biblical rules offer in addition to keep meetings sensible, productive, successful, and bathed in love. Of course the best rules are useless to people who don't understand them, and are unnecessary where the problems they are designed to solve don't exist. So each group should regard Robert's, and the Bible, as sources to draw upon as appropriate for its needs.

Usually a large group selects a few of its members to form a "rules committee" to propose a short list of rules which all participants should follow. Then the whole group discusses, perhaps amends, and approves its rules. There are also moderators, or parliamentarians, who study the problems that can bog down discussions and parliamentary solutions. They are the ones who will most study Robert's, and hopefully Bible studies like this, even if not everyone in the group does; although the value of this Bible study, for all participants, is their usefulness in all other human relationships besides this or any other group.

1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be... 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine (Gr: teaching) both to exhort [correct] and to convince [persuade] the gainsayers. [Gr: his critics or theological opponents; or, those who argue for argument's sake] 10 For there are many unruly [insubordinate, disobedient] and vain [Gr: senseless, or mischievous] talkers and deceivers... 11 Whose mouths must be stopped,

1 Peter 5:5 ...Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility:...

Luke 22:26 But ye shall not be so: [like kings] but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; ...he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

Titus 1:10-11 instructs church leaders. Another way of describing “unruly talkers whose mouths must be stopped” is “people who lack discussion skills, or don’t follow discussion rules, or perhaps don’t know discussion rules, for whom a moderator is needed.” Or “discussion participants lacking in orderly discussion skills”. The instruction is to church leaders, to become skilled moderators. Titus 1:9 makes that skill part of a church leader’s job description. It is of course an unnecessary skill in meetings where little discussion is even allowed.

How can everyone be “subject to” one another - 1 Peter 5? One step is through rules agreed to by the whole group. Even after we agree the Bible is our foundational rule book, we still need to discuss and agree upon how we should apply God’s principles in our group.

Secular forums, such as political party conventions, have rules committees which decide what rules the whole group will follow when they meet. Rules committee members are chosen by members of the whole group, and the rules they produce must be approved, after debate and

amendment, by the whole group. Robert's Rules of Order provide this system.

The whole Bible ought to be studied as a guide for human relationships. The rules created here can have can have Biblical authority over Christians only to the extent they correctly apply Biblical principles to modern situations.

An individual group may judge that some of these rules and explanations are incorrect; if so we hope they will improve them. A group may judge that these rules are too complicated for their needs, and may adopt only a fraction of them. A group may choose a moderator, or to only have rules and to mutually share the function of moderating, depending on the size and personality of the group. Logical criteria for a moderator would be mastery of whatever rules the group adopts, and skill in guiding participants in following them. The group needs to make a decision its members can honor.

Secular meetings from courts to legislatures to corporate board meetings to Parent-Teacher Associations have rules that are some adaption of Robert's Rules of Order. Such rules aim for civility and productivity, but do not aim for Christian love. Roberts' introduction says his goal was "a set of rules for conduct at meetings, that allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion." Which is a goal given in 1 Corinthians 14:40. That is certainly a goal of love. But perhaps people reasoning with each other would feel more love if their rules were clearly based on Scripture.

Roberts' contribution certainly merits our consideration as we search the Scriptures. Many churches have adapted his rules. But Roberts gave no Bible references in support of his rules. Surely deeper relationships are possible when interactions are guided by Scripture than when merely bound by convenient rules that do not credit God.

1e Discussion rules are unnecessary where there is little discussion –

– where interaction is dominated by a Leader who does most of the talking, controls the topic, and treats other subjects brought up as digressions which normally don't take more than a minute. Agreement is not critical, because no action is contemplated. It is not even important to know how much agreement exists.

But when a group moves beyond just talk to planning for action which requires everyone's wisdom, as well as readiness to act together, agreement becomes far more important, so the discovery of disagreement becomes far more disturbing. God's rules help develop the relationship skills we need to work and reason together in harmony, respect, and love, even when we disagree.

As with Robert's Rules of Order, it isn't necessary for every participant to know these Scriptures. If a few know them, that will make them available when there is a need, as far as the needs of the group are concerned.

But individuals have needs beyond those shared by the group. **The benefit to every individual of mastering these rules**, and the Scriptures that are their basis, is that they nurture the relationship skills we need to reason with each other even when we disagree. Those relationship skills will not only help us pull down Darkness, but will help us strengthen our marriages, families, friendships, workplaces, communities, and churches. They will enable us to reason with unbelievers, ala 1 Peter 3:15, bringing revival closer.

1f Rules should guide, not shackle

1 Timothy 1:9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

Galatians 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. 24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. 26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Mark 2:27 And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:

“Rules” help the “unruly” become productive. “Law is...made...for the lawless”, 1 Timothy 1:9. But it isn’t just “the other guy” who is in need. We need help, ourselves, developing our ability to reason with others even when we disagree, in Christian love.

Rules teach us, Galatians 3. They are made for our benefit. We are not made for their benefit, Mark 2. Penalties for violating rules are not needed for people who are already trying as hard as they can to live by them.

Our culture provides a school for these relationship skills which The Darkness has nearly destroyed: Family. God offers another school of skills able to heal families and other relationships: the 1 Corinthians 14 Fellowship. As conflicts arise, we need to continually meditate on the Word of God for solutions.

Jesus established a new measure of authority, which has become the foundation of Western Civilization: service. Voters choose authorities over themselves which they judge will best serve them.

Bible Commentator Albert Barnes says of 1 Timothy 1:9, The law is not made for a righteous man - There has been great variety in the interpretation of this passage. Some suppose that the law here refers to the ceremonial laws of Moses (Clarke, Rosenmuller, Abbot); others to the denunciatory part of the law (Doddridge and Bloomfield); and others that it means that the chief purpose of the law was to restrain the wicked. It seems clear, however, that the apostle does not refer merely to the ceremonial law, for he specifies that which condemns the unholy and profane; the murderers of fathers and mothers; liars and perjured persons. It was not the ceremonial law which condemned these things, but the moral law. [Actually, the criminal laws.]

It cannot be supposed, moreover, that the apostle meant to say that the law was not binding on a righteous man, or that he was under no obligation to obey it - for he everywhere teaches that the moral law is obligatory on all mankind.

To suppose also that a righteous man is released from the obligation to obey the law, that is, to do right, is an absurdity. Nor does he seem to mean, as Macknight supposes, that the law was not given for the purpose of justifying a righteous man - for this was originally one of its designs. Had man always obeyed it, he would have been justified by it. The meaning seems to be, that the purpose of the law was not to fetter and perplex those who were righteous, and who aimed to do their duty and to please God. It was not intended to produce a spirit of servitude and

bondage. As the Jews interpreted it, it did this, and this interpretation appears to have been adopted by the teachers at Ephesus, to whom Paul refers. The whole tendency of their teaching was to bring the soul into a state of bondage, and to make religion a condition, of servitude.

Paul teaches, on the other hand, that religion was a condition of freedom, and that the main purpose of the law was not to fetter the minds of the righteous by numberless observances and minute regulations, but that it was to restrain the wicked from sin. This is the case with all law. No good man feels himself fettered and manacled by wholesome laws, nor does he feel that the purpose of law is to reduce him to a state of servitude. It is only the wicked who have this feeling - and in this sense *the law is made for a man who intends to do wrong*.

Part 2: **“All of you can
take your turns
speaking what God
has revealed.”**

1 Cor 14:31

**2a All may challenge,
correct, and comfort each
other during meetings**

1 Corinthians 14:3 But [in a Christian meeting] he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, [οικοδομην, to build up, strengthen, inspire] and exhortation [παρακλησιν, to respectfully correct, implore], and comfort [παραμυθιαν, to give comfort and solace]. ISV: But the person who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding, encouragement, and comfort. BBE: But the word of the prophet gives men knowledge and comfort and strength.

1 Corinthians 14:31 (GW) All of you can take your turns speaking what God has revealed. In that way, everyone will learn and be encouraged. (CEV) Let only one person speak at a time, then all of you will learn something and be encouraged. (ASV) For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be exhorted;

(1 Corinthians 14:3 defines “prophesy” as encompassing the full range of Christian communication. Notice that the BBE translation calls the person who prophesies a “prophet”. The Greek contains only the verb “prophesy”, not the noun “prophet”. Many Bible commentators and scholars over the centuries have been confused by the statement in chapter 12 that only a few are “prophets”, but in chapter 14 all are called to “prophesy”. A simple comparison with singing can explain this. Everyone is called to “sing”, the verb, but only if you sing very well are you awarded the noun: you are a “singer”. Much confusion has resulted from imagining the difference is absolute, which Scripture does not say. Common sense and everyday observation reveal that the difference, whether of singing or of any other “Holy Spirit Gift”, is relative. It varies from person to person, and for each person, from one time to another.)

ALL. Seven times in 1 Corinthians 14, the most detailed format of a Christian meeting in the Bible, “all” are urged to “prophesy”. (Verses 1, 5, 12, 24, 26, 31, 30) The general meaning of the word “prophesy” [προφητεῖων] is to bring a message from God. Verse 3 explains the sense of the word which is meant in this chapter.

CHALLENGE. “Edification” means “architecture”, “help them grow”, “upbuilding”, and “building up”, according to Strong’s and the GW, ISV, and TLV translations. To “challenge” captures its sense.

The Greek word is οἰκοδομη. It combines οἰκία, meaning house, and δῶμα, meaning gift.

CORRECT. “Exhortation”, KJV, ranges from comfort to encouragement to “persuasive discourse” to “stirring address” to “admonishment” (correction), to “powerful hortatory discourse” (ie. a “fire and brimstone” message) according to Thayer’s Greek dictionary. These phrases describe correction that inspires, persuades, and comforts as well as warns. The Greek word is παρακλησις.

Yet in this American generation, “correct” is in disrepute, either the noun or the verb, so the following translations fall back to the politically correct “encouragement”: Berean, CEV, Darby, ERV, GNB, GW, Holman, ISV, NET, NIV, NLT, TS2009, and Weymouth translations.

ASV, Geneva, JUB, NAB, Webster, WEB and YLT stick to the rather obscure “exhortation”.

COMFORT. The “comfort” we are called to give each other is almost the same word as the word for the Holy Ghost which Jesus sent us. The former is the feminine gender of the word, and the latter is the masculine gender. John 14:26 says “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost”, teaches us “all things”, and reminds us of everything Jesus has told us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 is about God’s “comfort” for martyrs who are suffering for their faithfulness, which enables them to share the same comfort they receive with others who also suffer.

2b Speakers need to let others interact

1 Corinthians 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. 30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. 31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

This rule summarizes the whole purpose of Robert's Rules of Order: that in a group of, say, 200, the group may benefit from all 200 bp (brainpower) instead of just one or two bp where only one or two speaks, or do most of the speaking.

Where a "main speaker" takes "audience questions", more bp are available, although ordinarily the "questions" are very limited by time, usually are limited to literal questions, and are restricted to the one topic.

Where there are no rules, only the bp of the loudest, rudest talkers is available.

Robert's Rules guarantee the bp of all present, especially through its system of committees.

This verse states that God's rules, if followed, reach the same goal, but better: not mere human bp, but revelations from God. This verse establishes that God does not reveal wisdom only to The Main Speaker.

So when God reveals something to someone else, let him stand to speak, and let the current speaker wrap up his point with no further redundancy and sit down.

Do these verses authorize anyone to stand up and change the subject? It doesn't say so explicitly. It might imply that if it weren't for the following verse 32 which says

even when the Holy Spirit inspires us, we still need to be accountable to others.

The verse does not explicitly say one who wants to speak should stand to get attention, but the verse sort of implies it, and a person standing is much easier to notice than a hand raised. Especially when a hand is raised in the back of the room.

(The verse doesn't even explicitly say people should stand while speaking, but it is the practice in all but the smallest groups today and throughout historical records, because we speak louder when we are standing, and because we can be better heard, especially our consonants, when our mouths are in a line of sight with listeners' ears. That's because consonants are carried by the highest frequencies of our voices, 2,000-4,000 hz, which do not go around or through obstacles like low frequencies do. That's why sound systems place the tiny tweeters up high while the heavy subwoofers can be on the floor. The everyday experience proving these facts is that when your neighbor turns up his music some distance away, you hear mostly the bass, and hardly any of the higher pitched instruments or voices.)

2c Agendas should be approved by group vote

1 Corinthians 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

This passage entrusts the whole assembly, (“prophets”, plural), rather than one person, with responsibility for the flow of conversation, which logically would include meeting content.

Neither does this passage favor a “prophet” who suddenly starts speaking, interrupting whatever else may be going on, ostensibly “under divine inspiration”. Several Bible commentators agree.

The **Popular New Testament Bible Commentary** explains: “The statement is thus in glorious contrast with demoniacal impulses, under no control of consciousness and rational will (such cases, for example, as Act_16:16-18; Act_19:13-16), and with all wild, uncontrollable ravings. The Divine gift of prophecy left the gifted in full possession of their own faculties, enabling them to regulate and exercise their gift according to their own judgment of propriety as to the time and the mode of its exercise.”

Matthew Henry adds: “...the spiritual gifts they have leave them still possessed of their reason, and capable of using their own judgment in the exercise of them. Divine inspirations are not, like the diabolical possessions of heathen priests, violent and ungovernable, and prompting them to act as if they were beside themselves; but are sober and calm, and capable of regular conduct. The man inspired by the Spirit of God may still act the man, and observe the

rules of natural order and decency in delivering his revelations. His spiritual gift is thus far subject to his pleasure, and to be managed by his discretion....'Ye can (if ye will) prophesy one by one,' that is, restrain yourselves from speaking all together; 'and the spirits of the prophets,' that is, their own spirits, acted on by the Holy Spirit, are not so hurried away by His influence, as to cease to be under their own control; they can if they will hear others, and not demand that they alone should be heard uttering communications from God."

Bible commentator **John Darby**: "The spirits of the prophets (that is to say, the impulse of the power in the exercise of gifts) were subject to the guidance of the moral intelligence which the Spirit bestowed on the prophets. They were, on God's part, masters of themselves in the use of these gifts, in the exercise of this marvellous power which wrought in them. It was not a divine fury, as the pagans said of their diabolical inspiration, which carried them away; for God could not be the author of confusion in the assembly, but of peace."

Bible commentator **John Gill**: "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. Meaning either that the doctrines which the prophets deliver, the explanations they give of passages of Scriptures, the revelations they declare, are subject to the examination, judgment, and censure of other prophets; who have a right to try and judge them, either according to a more clear revelation they may have, or rather according to the sure word of prophecy, the Scriptures of truth; and indeed they are subject to the trial and judgment of the whole church, and therefore ought not to be stiff in their own sentiments, and obstinately persist in them, but cheerfully and readily submit them to be examined, and approved or disapproved by others; and particularly **when one that sits by signifies he has something revealed to him, which will better explain, or give further light into what the speaker is upon, he ought to submit and give way to him;** and thereby truth may be made manifest

and established, instruction, edification, and comfort promoted, and peace and order preserved:

“or else the sense is, that the spiritual gifts of the prophets, and the inspirations and instincts by which they are acted, and the affections which are excited in them, are subject to themselves, so that they can use, or not use those gifts; though they have the word of the Lord they can forbear speaking, as Jeremy did, for a while, and as the case of Jonah shows; or they can refrain themselves and be silent, and wait till they have proper opportunity of speaking, being not like the prophets of false gods, who are acted by an evil spirit, and observe no order or decorum, but with a sort of fury and madness deliver involuntarily what is suggested to them: but such is not the case of true prophets that are influenced and directed by the Spirit of God, who will give way to one another; one will be silent while the other speaks, and by turns prophesy one after another; and where there is not such a subjection, it is a sign that the Spirit of God is not in them....”

Bible commentator **Albert Barnes**: “...they were able to control their inclination to speak; they were not under a necessity of speaking, even though they might be inspired. There was no need of disorder. This verse gives confirmation to the supposition, that the extraordinary endowments of the Holy Spirit were subjected to substantially the same laws as a man’s natural endowments. They were conferred by the Holy Spirit; but they were conferred on free agents, and did not interfere with their free agency. And as a man, though of the most splendid talents and commanding eloquence, has ‘control’ over his own mind, and is not ‘compelled’ to speak, so it was with those who are here called prophets....”

“In this the spirit of true inspiration differed essentially from the views of the pagan, who regarded themselves as driven on by a wild, controlling influence, that compelled them to speak even when they were unconscious of what they said. Universally, in the pagan world, the priests and priestesses supposed or feigned that they were under an

influence which was uncontrollable; which took away their powers of self-command, and which made them the mere organs or unconscious instruments of communicating the will of the gods. The Scripture account of inspiration is, however, a very different thing. In whatever way the mind was influenced, or whatever was the mode in which the truth was conveyed, yet it was not such as to destroy the conscious powers of free agency, nor such as to destroy the individuality of the inspired person, or to annihilate what was special in his mode of thinking, his style, or his customary manner of expression.”

Cambridge Bible: “The possession of a special gift from on high has, from Montanus in the second century down to our own times, been supposed to confer on its possessor an immunity from all control, whether exercised by himself or others, and to entitle him to immediate attention to the exclusion of every other consideration whatsoever. St Paul, on the contrary, lays down the rule that spiritual, like all other gifts, are to be under the dominion of the reason, and may, like all other gifts, be easily misused.

“A holy self-restraint, even in the use of the highest gifts, must characterize the Christian.

“If a man comes into the assembly inspired to speak in an unknown tongue, the impulse is to be steadily repressed, unless there is a certainty that what is said can be interpreted, so that those present may understand it.

“If he comes into the assembly possessed with some overmastering idea, he must keep it resolutely back until such time as he can give it vent without prejudice to Christian order, without injury to that which must be absolutely the first consideration in all public addresses—the edification of the flock.

“Estius justly remarks that the difference between God’s prophets and those inspired by evil spirits is to be found in the fact that the latter are rapt by madness beyond their own control, and are unable to be silent if they will. And Robertson illustrates by a reference to modern forms of

fanaticism the truth that ‘uncontrolled religious feeling’ is apt to ‘overpower both reason and sense.’”

Bible commentator **Adam Clarke**: “And the spirits of the prophets, etc. - Let no one interrupt another; and let all be ready to prefer others before themselves; and let each feel a spirit of subjection to his brethren. God grants no ungovernable gifts.”

Here is an example of how this principle could be applied to setting a meeting’s agenda:

Moderator: “At the end of our last meeting you voted to give Brother ___ 8 minutes to explain his interest in ___, and for my topic, you asked that a part of it be a Bible study on whether Matthew 25:39-46 indicates a sense in which, although we can’t literally repay Jesus, we can ‘pay it forward’.

“Now as we begin our meeting, four agenda proposals have been presented to me for your consideration. First is from Brother ___, who requests 1 minute to announce his engagement! Second is from Sister ___, who requests 3 minutes to report progress on food distribution discussions. Third is from a 4-member committee of our members, who request 5 minutes to summarize their witness at a school board meeting, and the response there, and to allow a couple of minutes to take questions. Fourth is from Brother ___, who has passed out a flier about ___ and requests 4 minutes of discussion to learn your responses. Only the fourth item was submitted as a time sensitive matter.

“In addition to these requests for time before the whole assembly, we have six announcements by small committees requesting volunteers for discussion, prayer, and action. I will read these announcements and ask you to indicate by raising your hand if you are willing to help those committees.

“Is there any discussion of these proposed agenda items before we vote?”

Robert’s Rules of Order offer a variety of ways members can influence the agenda.

Legislatures have a tightly organized system that favors the will of the majority in a very intense setting full of deadlines: the majority party elects one person to be the Speaker, whose principal duty is actually not to speak, but to moderate, and to set the agenda, along with assigning members to committees, half of which are by their choice. As he sets the agenda, he favors bills where an unofficial survey indicates enough votes to pass. The controversial part is when he veers from an impartial moderator role to a dictator role, suppressing bills which the majority favor; but his power to harm in this way is limited by the fact that he can be voted out of office by his own party, and by the fact that if he strays too far from the wishes of voters, his party could become the minority after the next election.

2d Don't desert people under attack, when attacks are lies

Matthew 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Jude 17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

It actually is a blessing, however bittersweet, to find that your enemies can't think of anything bad to say about you without lying!

Bitter, to see how many friends join your enemies in defaming you because your conclusions are so unacceptable, that it becomes irrelevant whether they are true.

Sweet, to see that your enemies completely overlook the things you have said and done that you are actually ashamed of, as if they are relatively bored by that, being more enraged by the stand you have taken for God that you are most confident is right.

The judgment may certainly be scrutinized, of someone who has been the target of scandalous, cruel lies. If you criticize such a victim, with criticism that is Biblical and reasonable, and if he is wise, he will love you for correcting

him. Proverbs 9:8. Because if you can equip him to face the next attack better prepared, you will save him much pain.

Even if your criticism is neither Biblical nor reasonable, and even if he is not very wise, he will love you for criticizing him to his face, rather than behind his back where he has no chance to defend himself.

Anyone willing to take arrows for Jesus, or for any good work, should be respected, and defended to the extent his stand was correct, based on *all* the facts - not just those facts alleged by Hell's representatives.

Every group already defends its sullied champions, to an extent, within an unarticulated, arbitrary line that falls short of sheltering people caked in "too much" mud. A little soiling, and the man has "courage". Way too much, and the man is an "extremist"; embarrassing. No association, please.

The problem is when this "line" is drawn according to the volume of public vilification, which is an imperfect measure of innocence. Any kind of "line" needs to be drawn so as to shelter Truth, no matter how much of the world mocks.

Answer to a mocker: "I see that you are mocking me. (Not for any idea I came up with by myself, but for ideas I found in the Bible. In fact you are mocking me *for* believing the Bible.) The Bible said you would do that." [That zinger courtesy of Pastor Terry Amann.]

Part 3: Ideal topics:

**“Let your light so
shine before men,
that they may see
your good works,
and glorify your
Father”** Mat 5:16

**3a Let’s talk about what
we together will give**

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

Proverbs 14:23 (TLV) In all hard work there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

Matthew 5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. 14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 21:21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

James 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. 15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. 16 Hereby

perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1 Timothy 6:17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; 18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; 19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

John 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Titus 3:8 lesson: “We don’t want empty talk. We await action, and expect results.” “Profitable” = “gives results”.

“Good works” in this verse is contrasted with “foolish questions” in the next as if they are opposites: “good works” are “profitable”, while talk with no goal of getting Light out into the Darkness, or of helping anyone Outside, is “unprofitable”.

Matthew 5:13-16 lesson: Christian faith ought not be so weak that we are satisfied to merely declare how dark the Darkness is. Let our faith grow strong enough to plan a very bright Light. Not just for ourselves, under our safe comfortable “bushel”. But for others, who walk in Darkness. Darkness is not a merely intellectual thing. Darkness enslaves people. Truth that does not set people free is not the

whole Truth. John 8:32. And it is impossible to even know the Truth, to the extent we do not obey Jesus' teaching.

Matthew 21:21-22 lesson: Christian faith ought not remain so weak that we are satisfied to merely *talk* about mountains of evil! God equips us with the power to knock down as many of them as we are willing to pray about, think about, and act against *together*.

Our courage ought not remain so shallow that we barely dare to *name* the Dragon slaying our family, friends, churches, and nation. Our mission is to *face* it, and *slay* it.

Our trust in the promises of Jesus ought to reach beyond merely complaining about how high the Mountain of Evil is that destroys all we love, all the way to plotting how to make it jump in the lake and be baptized.

James 2:14-17 lesson: The verbiage in this passage is that faith without “works” (action) is not faith. But the example given is that *prayer* without action is not prayer! “be ye warmed and filled” is a prayer. That is, it is an *implied* prayer. It is certainly not a doctrine, or belief.

Think about the difference between saying “Be ye warmed and filled”, and what you hear in secular movies, “it’s going to be OK”.

When a “blessing”, or in other words a wish for another to do well, is offered in a context with no mention of God, much less trust in God to make everything “OK”, the promise is empty. It has no power. The person saying it has no ability to make it so, and there is no reliance on any other power. But in a Christian context, where it is still obvious that the Christian giving the blessing has no power to make it so just by saying the words, the implication is that the Christian is trusting God to make it so, and that by saying it, he is indirectly *asking* God to make it so. So in that sense, the example given in James is of an implied prayer.

Except that James' point is that just *saying* a prayer for *God* to do something which you yourself can and should do, not being married to action, is not much of a prayer. It is a misunderstanding of prayer.

1 John 3:14-18 and **1 Timothy 6:17-19** lesson: John describes American Christians who have “this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him”. How shall we answer John’s question, “how dwelleth the love of God in him?” If we do not “love our brother” enough to “lay down our lives” for him, we “abide in death” and have not “passed from death unto life”.

Can we exist in this condition, perhaps still meeting together but only for talk that leads to no help for those in need, and justly trust in our Ticket to Heaven?

God powerfully, graphically calls us to do more than talk when we meet. Not that we can’t talk. There can be little action with zero talk. But the focus of our talk should be to prepare ourselves for action, and to strategize how to act.

When Talk IS Action Let’s not get confused over the meaning of “talk”. Often the very “action” that catapults the most Light into the Darkness that oppresses those in need is actually “talk”. The difference is between quiet, friendly, safe, private conversation between friends, and confronting evil, hostile, if not violent enemies of people in need. The latter is often classified as “action”. For example, politicians often urge us to “take action”, when what they mean is usually not physical action like fighting or even jogging, but is communicating. Much talk among relative friends in relative safety and privacy is often necessary to prepare for getting communications out in the Darkness where they can shine Light which can deliver the oppressed.

Acting together, in love for each other as well as for the victims of the Darkness outside, requires the full range of Biblical discipleship, so many traditional church subjects may require Saltshaker time. But when action is shoved into the remote distance, little urgency is felt about powerful discipleship. **It is when action is imminent that the need to grasp God’s lessons about personal development is pressing.**

This is personal. This is not about some sterile idea of “politics” – judging right and wrong about some authority

remote from our daily lives. This is about destruction that has touched us personally and hurt those we love.

God offers a cure for our depression and despair for all the evil in the world: heal it! Neutralize it so it can never hurt anyone else, ever again!

We aren't just fighting until Evil leaves *us* alone. Our "revenge" will be total victory over evil, with good, for all, in our time and for the future.

3b Where we won't help, let's not complain

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish questions [stupid inquiries],...for they are unprofitable and vain.

1 Timothy 1:4 Neither give heed to [conversations] which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. [TLV: or to pay attention to...useless speculations rather than God's training which is in faithfulness.] 5 Now the end [purpose, goal] of the commandment ["all that God has commanded", Bible commentator Albert Barnes presumes] is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: 6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain [without a goal] jangling;

2 Timothy 2:23 But foolish and unlearned [uneducated, uninformed] questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. [ISV: Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid discussions, because you know they breed arguments.] 24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

Job 15:3 (GW) Should he argue with "words that don't help," with speeches that don't help anyone?

Inquiries below our capacity: What are today's "foolish questions", Titus 3:9? "Stupid questions" is the choice of several modern translations. "Useless speculations", says 1 Timothy 1:4. "Foolish and unlearned [uneducated, uninformed] questions [issues]", 2 Timothy 2:23. "Words that

don't help", Job 15:3.

"Foolish" and "stupid" are relative terms. They are a measure of intelligence in proportion to one's capacity. One is in a "stupor" whose brainpower is temporarily far below his potential. A grown man who talks like a 3-year-old is "stupid", but a baby who talks at all is brilliant.

We who are empowered to move mountains, yet all we do is talk about how evil those mountains are, as we leave them standing, are "stupid". We are grown adults talking as if we were helpless 3-year-olds.

When Christians gather, we need to talk about what we are going to do. We need to pick mountains of evil to pull down, and our talk should be only what is necessary to get us pulling together.

Soldiers in battle don't shoot all the time. Sometimes they have to stop shooting long enough to talk about where to shoot.

The previous verse, Titus 3:8, had said our "constant" focus must be the "maintenance" of "good works", which are "good and profitable". "This is good and helps other people", adds the GW translation. This verse, 9, says "foolish questions" are "vain".

"Vain" describes talk without a realistic goal, or without any goal at all: talk without action. *Vincent's Word Studies* says the word (μάταιοι, vain) is frequent in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) but in the New Testament it is found only here, in 1 Corinthians 3:20 and 15:17.

"The sense is aimless or resultless, as μάταιος εὐχή a prayer which cannot obtain fulfillment. The questions, genealogies, etc., lead to no attainment or advancement in godliness. Compare ματαιολογία jangling, 1Ti_1:6; ματαιολόγοι vain talkers, 1Ti_1:10; ματαιότης vanity, Rom_8:20; Eph_4:17; ἐματαιώθησαν were made vain, Rom_1:21; μάτην in vain, Mat_15:9." - *Vincent's Word Studies*

News reports. What a waste of precious mountain-

toppling time, to report news that does not motivate people to act, or that doesn't help us understand the mountain of evil we are pulling down. News, to be useful, must include a range of action suggestions and relevant contact information.

Don't report news whose outcome you are unwilling to change. Of course, we should monitor other important battle fields than the one we especially engage, so we can shift support as needed, when needed, whether our support is our wisdom, our money, or contacting critical people. But where there is no vision of action, ever, there is no need for talk.

Opposites: "Good Works" vs. "foolish questions". Titus 3:8 tells us "good works" are "profitable". "Profitable" and "unprofitable" denote two conditions which are opposite of each other. When that which is "profitable" degenerates, it moves towards the "unprofitable" end of the scale. And vice versa.

By calling "good works" "profitable" and "foolish questions..." "unprofitable", is God hinting that good works can degenerate into foolish questions? That the two are opposite ends of the same scale? Is this our everyday experience? Is there more definite Scriptural support for such a concept?

Perhaps, indeed, it is our everyday experience that "good works" degenerate into "foolish questions".

Our first impression would be that the opposite of "good works" is "bad works". Maybe, but that is not the spectrum indicated by Titus 3:8-9. Yet it is a familiar, everyday experience for our "good works" to degenerate. We don't need to wholly forfeit our salvation and give ourselves to Satan for our good works to wholly degenerate.

But when that happens, the opposite is not "bad works", but something else. First they become "half-hearted works". Then one becomes inactive; actions, or "works", cease, giving way to talk. And at first the talk which replaces action may seem worthwhile. Profound. Wise. So as to justify the pursuit of wisdom at the expense of action. But the longer one remains inactive, the less able one is to hold wise insights

without facing the reality that one should be acting. So one must either begin doing “good works” again, or one must degenerate further, until the pursuit of knowledge is more and more abstract, more and more irrelevant, more and more frivolous.

This is a familiar, everyday pattern, in ourselves and in our Christian brothers, by which “good works” degenerate all the way to “foolish questions”.

And then just as we have become as irrelevant as it would seem possible, it is also a familiar experience to watch the pendulum swing back again.

When “foolish questions” start to turn around, they may become “reasonable questions” and then “wise questions”, but the person finally asking “wise questions” still has room to improve: he can keep on improving until he is not merely thinking about wise questions and searching out their answers, but he is doing something about them - he is applying what he knows to how he lives - he is doing “good works”.

If this is true - if this is what God means by Titus 3:8-9, then what makes inquiry “foolish” is lack of relevance to how we live, and what we do. What is the purpose of a doctrine which doesn’t affect how we live? Surely many of the doctrines which divide “churches” today fail this test.

But besides everyday experience, is there any other Scripture which more definitely tells us the relationship between “good works” and “foolish questions”?

Here is another familiar passage which indicates that the test of whether a doctrine is “profitable” is whether it affects how we live:

James 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

In saying “shew me thy faith without thy works”, James sarcastically mocks the very idea that anyone can exercise faith independently of action! James is ridiculing the very idea that “faith” can be defined as mere intellectual belief!

What a foolish idea, that anyone can really believe, intellectually, that Jesus died for us and rose from the dead, without gratefully taking action, such as charging ahead with witness so effective that it relieves the oppressed, and invites persecution?! What nonsense!

3c Ignore suspicions we can't prove or act upon

Titus 1:14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables...that turn from the truth.

1 Timothy 1:4 Neither give heed to fables...which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

2 Timothy 2:23 But foolish and unlearned [uneducated, uninformed] questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. [ISV: Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid discussions, because you know they breed arguments.]

Conspiracy theories. Don't theorize about conspiracies, like Area 51, demolition bombs in the Twin Towers, jet contrails, a ["Well to Hell"](#), control of the world by the CFR or the Rockefellers, or messages from the Virgin Mary, where there is no vision of action, or even proof of a problem.

Health. Don't squander Saltshaker discussion time for health claims like cancer treatments or vitamin supplements where your group has neither the medical training to examine competing claims, nor the willingness to scrutinize detailed studies, nor any vision of action your group could take to change medical laws or regulations. Put that on a bulletin board for anyone interested for their own use. It does not merit group discussion time which is for getting Salt out of the Shaker and Light out into the Darkness.

Accusations. Don't accuse anyone, or any organization, without giving those you accuse (or at least their supporters) as much opportunity to defend themselves as they will use.

Don't accuse before you are ready to do the research necessary to document your accusation solidly enough to withstand all the scrutiny that anyone can give it.

Don't accuse without a vision of action that your group can take to heal the evil you see. Don't accuse without love for those you accuse, with the desire for repentance and reconciliation, with no trace of gloating.

3d Don't Assume

Proverbs 14:15 Fools believe every word they hear, but wise people think carefully about everything. (ERV)

1 Corinthians 14:29 [When Christians meet] Two or three people should speak what God has revealed. Everyone else should decide whether what each person said is right or wrong. (GW)

Acts 17:11 The people in Berea were more open-minded [KJV: noble] than those in Thessalonica. They were so glad to hear the message Paul told them. They studied the Scriptures every day to make sure that what they heard was really true. (ERV)

1 Thessalonians 5:21 Let all things be tested; [prove all things]; keep to what is good; (BBE)

Jeremiah 5:31 The prophets tell lies. The priests will not do what they were chosen to do, and my people love it this way! But what will you people do when your punishment comes? (ERV)

Jeremiah 29:8 For this is what the Lord of armies, the God of Israel, has said: Do not let yourselves be tricked by the prophets who are among you, and the readers of signs, and give no attention to their dreams which they may have; 9 For they are saying to you what is false in my name: I have not sent them, says the Lord. (BBE)

Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their

fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Matthew 24:4 ...Take heed that no man deceive you.

Revelation 2:2 I know everything you have done, including your hard work and how you have endured. I know you won't put up with anyone who is evil. When some people pretended to be apostles, you tested them and found out that they were liars. (CEV)

Romans 16:17 ...Mark them which cause divisions... [which is] contrary to the [teaching about love] which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 ... by good words and fair speeches [they] deceive the hearts of the simple. 19 ...I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

2 Peter 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable [divisions], even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

1 Timothy 4:1 The Spirit says clearly that in later times some believers will desert the Christian faith. They will follow spirits that deceive, and they will believe the teachings of demons. (GW)

2 Timothy 3:13 But evil people and phony preachers will go from bad to worse as they mislead people and are themselves misled. (GW)

1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Luke 2:42 And when he was twelve years old, they

went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast...46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. 47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. 48 And when they saw him, they were amazed:

Our example is Jesus, at the age of 12. Before he went public with his positions, he sought out the brightest experts in the whole world on the subject of the theologies he was born to correct. He tested His understanding against theirs, passed that severest of tests, and then just thought about it for almost 20 more years. Then He was ready to go into their courts and win every time.

We, too, should test our assumptions by submitting them to the experts most qualified to refute them, should they prove wrong. While we are waiting for the attention of top experts, we can present our theories to whoever will listen, always open to evidence of weakness in our theories.

Concern for accuracy in our grasp of public issues is not widespread, because commitment to using our knowledge to help others is not widespread. If all we are going to do with information is entertain ourselves, it needn't be accurate. In fact, the more salacious, at the expense of accuracy, the more entertaining. Only when we intend to present our understanding to well informed authorities in order to urge them to relieve the oppressed do we become concerned that all our work may fail because of our own ignorance.

3^e Action requires some spiritual training but action is part of spiritual training

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

James 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

There can be no more active action than laying down your life for others! What love that requires! Even just a little activism at just a little personal cost, that takes just a little time, requires more love than is generally found apart from the influence of the Bible.

Love Training. Therefore all that God teaches us about love has its place in preparing for action. But learning *about* love can never progress to *love*, without action in the course of learning, any more than we can keep filling up our car's gas tank forever without ever driving anywhere.

To the extent one has love but no resolve to sacrifice for others, one has no love, according to Jesus' definition. Similarly, Light, without resolve to venture into the dangerous, costly Darkness, is like a bullet without a target. It serves no purpose.

Many Biblical topics have their place in Saltshaker Forums. There is a need for Biblical teaching. For example:

Mountain Training. Huge goals will not be seriously pursued without believing God's promises of huge resources.

Enemy-Loving Training. Enemies can't be healed and reconciled into friends without forgiving grace and love; hating enemies can perpetuate hostility between people groups for centuries. By loving enemies, persecution may linger longer than we think we can bear but in time love washes away tyranny and oppression with freedom, peace, prosperity, and safety.

Spirit Testing Training. Serious study of issues, and the testing of allegations, to make sure we are not marching into spiritual live fire with spiritual rubber bullets, will not proceed without appreciating God's appeals to be "wise as serpents", to "love correction", to "study to show thyself approved", and to search for wisdom like others search for treasure.

Purpose Of Life Training. Grief and depressions can paralyze Christians to the extent they don't appreciate how the creative discernment between good and evil that God has given us in His own Image is satisfied as we interact with our environment to make it better, filling Darkness with Light, Evil with Good, Lies with Truth, Emptiness with Meaning.

Cost Of Discipleship Training. But there is nothing that will jump start personal spiritual development like the urgent need for it created by an imminent heavy cost for following Christ, Who is Truth. Testimonies from countries where following Christ is not nearly so safe or comfortable document that even where there has been very little opportunity for formal personal spiritual development, a high cost of discipleship has almost instantly transformed lukewarm believers into lions of faith.

But without any resolve or expectation of venturing into the Darkness, what need is there, even, for Light? It takes very little personal spiritual development to sit and listen to someone else talk.

In saying "shew me thy faith without thy works", James

sarcastically mocks the very idea that anyone can exercise faith independently of action! James is ridiculing the very idea that “faith” can be defined as mere intellectual belief! What a foolish idea, that anyone can really believe, intellectually, that Jesus died for us and rose from the dead, without gratefully taking action, such as charging ahead with witness so effective that it invites persecution?! What nonsense!

3f Let's not measure ourselves by others but by our *own* God-given potential

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish...genealogies...for they are unprofitable and vain [Greek: without a goal].

1 Timothy 1:4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

1 Corinthians 13:5 [Love] ...thinketh no evil... [literally, does not take inventory of what is worthless]

“Genealogies” were a source of pride among Jews. They loved to brag about who their ancestors were, as if that gave them favor with God. Our counterpart could include bragging about how pure our church doctrines are, or about anything else we are proud of.

In fact, the essence of “Prejudice” is to imagine that some difference between us and others makes us superior to others. Genealogy is a popular fuel for this fantasy - the assignment to ourselves of a superior pedigree. Anything else will serve: our own “One True Church”, our superior church Doctrines, political party, wealth, social status, skin color – prejudices can be as creative as they are ridiculous.

One form of “Genealogy Worship” that still exists in America today is skin shade prejudice. Commonly called racial prejudice. The “White Identity Movement” apparently still exists. A common version of the doctrine is that Jews and Blacks are literally, physically descended from Eve’s sex

with Satan in the Garden of Eden! “But even if such a thing happened, how could their descendants have survived Noah’s Flood?” you ask. “Simple. It wasn’t a worldwide flood.” “Oh really? The Bible is wrong about that? If you don’t trust the Bible about that, why do you trust the Bible about whether Eve existed, or Satan, or Eden?” “The Rockefellers changed the Bible’s flood story, but not the Garden story.” Anyway, the doctrine is a modern genealogy debate that matches the passage very well.

As great an evil as the dehumanization of Blacks and Jews as physically only half human, is the comparison of these alleged monsters, by adherents of this doctrine, with themselves: “all you monsters are descended from Satan. We glorious whites, by contrast, are the Master Race. Beloved of God, Who is also white.” (Or words to that effect.)

Matthew Henry: “There are needful questions to be discussed and cleared, such as make for improvement in useful knowledge; but idle and foolish enquiries, tending neither to God’s glory nor the edification of men, must be shunned. Some may have a show of wisdom, but are vain, as many among the Jewish doctors, as well as of later schoolmen, who abound with questions of no moment or use to faith or practice; avoid these. Genealogies: some lawful and useful enquiries might be made into these things, to see the fulfilling of the scriptures in some cases, and especially in the descent of Christ the Messiah; but all that served to pomp only, and to feed vanity, in boasting of a long pedigree, and much more such as the Jewish teachers were ready to busy themselves in and trouble their hearers with,…”

Mormon churches are probably the only churches today which make the study of the genealogies of members a part of their theology. So is there nothing in other churches today which merits Paul’s censure of genealogies? Are there no dark parallels to look for in our practices today, to the use made of genealogies then which Paul sought to end? Are none of our practices today implicated by Paul’s rule?

Church Doctrines. Although the word “doctrines”

appears several times in the New Testament, it never means what it does today: a human-created abbreviated summary and characterization of Bible principles which people must agree with as a condition of formal church membership.

The word in the Bible simply meant “teaching”. It was never an abbreviated statement, but it meant the entire teaching of someone. Although rejection of righteous teaching was a basis for identifying someone as an unbeliever, there was no such thing as requiring acceptance of doctrine as a precondition for formal church membership, because there was no such thing as formal church membership.

Yet there may be a good purpose for church doctrines as we define them today – summaries of important Bible teachings: to take a public stand for teachings of the Bible at a time when those teachings, along with Biblical authority, are under attack.

The dark use made of church doctrines is to assure yourself that you will go to Heaven because you intellectually affirm them, and to satisfy you that people in other churches who reject your summaries of Scripture are going to Hell.

This dark use defies 1 Corinthians 4:5 which says don’t judge like that before Judgment Day when God will reveal to all of us, each other’s motives. It defies Romans 14 which reminds us that other people aren’t working for us but for God, so we need to let God be the One to decide if their work is good.

Church membership itself is misused as a measure of how good we are, compared with how spiritually bankrupt others are who go to a different church.

Outside church, people have all kinds of measures of merit by which they judge their fellows and exalt themselves: their political party, their wealth, their social status, their skin color – prejudices can be as creative as they are ridiculous.

Prejudice. Indeed, the essence of what is misused about genealogies then was prejudice.

There is a good and a dark use made of genealogies

today, as then. The good side extends the principle “Honor your father and mother, that you may live long.” To honor our parents is to appreciate their sacrifices for us, which is evidence that their instructions for us are for our own benefit. Realizing that motivates us to obey their instructions.

This principle is at work in genealogical societies which honor ancestors who have contributed much to the world. For example, descendants of soldiers in the Civil War or in the American Revolutionary War, or descendants of passengers of the Mayflower which sailed in 1620. Such societies skip over all their family tree criminals in between, and honor those whose examples inspire us.

The dark use of genealogies is to wear expensive medals and ribbons and put it on your resume that you are descended from a glorious ancestor, which somehow makes you glorious despite all the criminals between you two. Indeed my 12th generation grandpappy was Richard Warren who sailed on the Mayflower in 1620, which looks grand spanking cool on my resume, and I notice how impressed people seem when I tell them about it. When he died in 1627, his wife, my grandmum, was the first woman in America to vote, as Head of Household over 7 children.

Actually Richard Warren wasn't even one of the Separatists. The Pilgrims brought with them as many non-separatists as themselves, in order to supply the skills they needed to establish a settlement.

It might be tempting to brag that my link to Warren makes me related to “President Ulysses S. Grant, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, astronaut Alan Shepard, author Laura Ingalls Wilder (Little House on the Prairie series), actor Richard Gere, Lavinia Warren, also known as Mrs. Tom Thumb, educator and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and the Wright brothers.” As long as I ignore the fact that there might be only 11 people we would like to remember out of [14 million descendants!](#)

[\[www.geni.com/people/Richard-Warren-Mayflower-Passenger/6000000000286600393\]](http://www.geni.com/people/Richard-Warren-Mayflower-Passenger/6000000000286600393)

I talk about my Warren connection to give glory to God, because then I get to tell how it was the Bible studies of John Robinson, their pastor who was unable to leave Holland, which was responsible for a vote given to some women as well as to all men; and not just to church members but even to unbelievers; and not just to “free men” but even to servants! Unheard of anywhere else, outside the Bible.

Robinson left behind 1,000 pages of Bible studies showing exactly which verses were the bases for these freedoms, which spread across America and became the freedoms we take for granted today. I glorify God by the documentary I made of these events, where I interviewed the world’s experts on what happened then, during a triennial convention in Plymouth, Massachussets of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants. See www.1620.US.

I also built a parade float, a replica of the Mayflower built on a car, which has “sailed” in about 20 Iowa parades in 2018 and 2019, as a warmup for the 400th anniversary of the original voyage. (Alas! In 2020, all Iowa parades were canceled because of Covid-19!) The float proclaims on the side, “They got freedom of speech and religion, and a vote for all, from the Bible.”

The Saltshaker Forum they created on Sunday afternoons was shaped directly by 1 Corinthians 14 (they called it a “Prophesying Service” because “prophesying” is the word in that chapter for the robust verbal interaction called for) and many similar but less detailed passages, which are also the model for Saltshaker Forums today.

But not every Mayflower descendant welcomes this glorification of God Whom the Pilgrims (they called themselves “Separatists”) glorified. Some are annoyed when the subject of this very reason the Pilgrims sailed comes up. This suppresses the frequency with which the subject comes up. They want to get discussion back to the relatively trivial details of the customs, technology, and interaction with natives of the time.

For them, the value of Mayflower Society membership is

not to study together, and proclaim to the world together, the Gift of God which our ancestors unwrapped in 1620, a blessing for all the people of the world even today, but the value is for Mayflower passenger descendants alone, to brag to the world about what famous family lines they have, never mind the dozen generations of misfits in between.

The Pharisees similarly used their genealogies back to Abraham to honor themselves, believing that only fellow descendants of Abraham were favored by God. The idea that Abraham's faith was an equal blessing for all men was not on their radar.

The Pharisees were so impressed with their own spiritual authority by virtue of their genealogy that they didn't think they needed to listen to Jesus, so Jesus had to explain to them that what gives one favor with God is not who your physical father or ancestor was, but Who your spiritual Father is. John 8:39-44. (Which, by the way, is a passage quoted by White Identity folks. They quote the statement that "You Pharisees are [spiritually] descended from your father, Satan", and pass over the clarification a few verses later, "I know you are [physically] descended from Abraham.")

Matthew 23:29-36, Jesus condemns the Pharisees for building monuments to righteous prophets, and insisting that had they lived then they would not have persecuted them, all the while persecuting the obviously more righteous miracle-working Jesus – which proves they were descended both physically and spiritually from the persecutors of the prophets.

B. W. Johnson: "Ye build the tombs of the prophets, etc. They honored the prophets and saints by building monuments to them, instead of following their teaching, or imitating their lives. Even Herod the Great, a monster of wickedness, rebuilt the tomb of David."

Pulpit Bible Commentary on Mat 23:30 "Stier quotes a striking passage from the Berlenberger Bibel: 'Ask in Moses times, 'Who are the good people?' They will be

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but not Moses,— he should be stoned. Ask in Samuel’s times, ‘Who are the good people?’ They will be Moses and Joshua, but not Samuel. Ask in the times of Christ, and they will be all the former prophets with Samuel, but not Christ and his apostles.’ May the Lord save us from this spirit of unworthy jealousy, and teach us to honour goodness, not only in the remote distance, which is easy, but in immediate proximity to us, which is sometimes, alas for our miserable selfishness! very hard indeed. ‘Charity envieth not:’ follow after charity.”

MHCC: “We sometimes think, if we had lived when Christ was upon earth, that we should not have despised and rejected him, as men then did; yet Christ in his Spirit, in his word, in his ministers, is still no better treated.”

Part 4: Respectful Discussion

**“wisdom...pure...
peaceable, gentle...
full of mercy and
good fruits”** James 3:17

**4a Wise folks LOVE true,
respectful, needed, meek,
and reciprocal criticism;
wise rules encourage it**

(Even when criticism is none of these, wise folks will suffer it and learn)

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: [Gr: study what kind of prodding of each other will stir up love and result in doing good together] 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but

exhorting [Gr: “correcting” is within its range of meaning] one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.

Psalms 32:3(CEV) Before I confessed my sins, my bones felt limp, and I groaned all day long. 4 (BBE) For the weight of your hand was on me day and night; my body became dry like the earth in summer. 5 (ERV) But then I decided to confess my sins to the LORD. I stopped hiding my guilt and told you about my sins. And you forgave them all!

Psalms 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod [a long strong stick for striking predators] and thy staff [a long light stick for pulling back a straying sheep with a curved end that fits around a sheep’s neck] they comfort me.

Ephesians 4:25 ...speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. 26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 Neither give place to the devil. [v. 26, Vincent’s Word Studies says “Righteous anger is commanded, not merely permitted.”]

Proverbs 9:8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: **rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.**

James 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and **easy to be intreated**, [TLV: **open to reason**] full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Proverbs 26:20 Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. 21 As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Proverbs 17:9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.

Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works Should we actually *provoke* each other to love? Ought THAT be the focus of Christian meetings? *Provoke*? Since provocation is normally considered what should be *avoided* in Christian meetings, dismissed as “controversial” and “divisive”, some analysis of the Greek is appropriate, to prove that these translations really are correct.

“Provoke unto love and good works” sounds like the way parents raise children. Children don’t come full of love right out of the box. Parents have to *provoke* them to grow up willing to love and do good. It seems Christians don’t arise out of the Baptismal waters magically willing to love and do good, either. We need some prodding. *Continual* prodding. Even some New Testament spanking.

That really is the meaning of the Greek words in this verse. The King James Version wording is shared by the ASV, Geneva, JUB, and the Young's Literal Translation. Bible in Basic English: "And let us be moving one another at all times to love and good works".

"...consider one another to provoke unto..." translates the Greek phrase **κατανοῶμεν** [observe fully, as if observing enemy movements on a battlefield, in order to plan effective action] **ἄλλήλους** [each other] **εἰς** [into] **παροξυσμὸν** [incitement to good, or dispute in anger; contention].

Vincent's Word Studies analyzes the Greek:

Let us **consider** one another (κατανοῶμεν ἄλλήλους) - Take careful note of each other's spiritual welfare. ...It denotes attentive, continuous care. Compare with Hebrews 3:1. [Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, *consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus] (More on this word is posted at James 1:23 where the word also appears:) With the notion of attentively considering (κατά, down into, or through;...So that the contrast is not between a hasty look and a careful contemplation (Jas_1:25, looketh). **It is not mere careless hearing of the word which James rebukes, but the neglect to carry into practice what is heard.** One may be an attentive and critical hearer of the word, yet not a doer.

To **provoke** (εἰς παροξυσμὸν) - Literally *with a view to incitement*. The word appears in the New Testament only here and in Acts 15:39. [Acts 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus] The word comes from the word παροξύνειν, meaning to sharpen. Hence to stimulate. In Acts 15:39, the word describes the *result* of provocation; irritation or contention. Here the word describes the *act* of incitement. The word is used only twice in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old testament: in Deuteronomy 29:28 [And the LORD rooted them out of their land in *anger*, and in *wrath*, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is

this day.] and Jeremiah 39:3, 7; there, the Greek word translates the Hebrew אַרָּף anger, wrath, altercation. The Hebrew derivation is from אֶצֶק a splinter.

Conclusion: The new economy demands mutual care on the part of the members of the Christian community. Compare with 1 Corinthians 12:25. They must *stir up* each other's religious affections and ministries.

The Easy Reading Version (ERV) captures the idea of observing for the purpose of plotting action, of consider/κατανοῶμεν: “We should *think about each other to see how we can* encourage each other to show love and do good works.”

“Encourage each other” is of course a friendlier, less confrontational approach than to “provoke one another” which the original Greek communicates. This weaker sense is the choice of GW and CEV: (GW) We must also consider how to *encourage* each other to show love and to do good things. (CEV) We should keep on *encouraging* each other to be thoughtful and to do helpful things. GNB's choice is similarly non-confrontational: (GNB) Let us be concerned for one another, to *help one another* to show love and to do good.

ISV has a slightly more vigorous choice: (ISV) And let us *continue to consider how to* motivate one another to love and good deeds,

“Stir up” indicates nearly as much not-always-welcome disruption of the TV-watching schedules of lazy Christians as does “provoke”: (TLV) And let us consider how to *stir up* one another to love and good deeds. (TS2009) And let us be concerned for one another in order to *stir up* love and good works,

Confession, Psalm 32. Nothing can make criticism so meek as to serve it with confession of one's own like mistakes. Which we can all do, especially if we remember from Matthew 5 that *desire* to sin makes us as guilty before God as if we *commit* sin.

Examples of thought crimes before God in Matthew 5 are anger without cause, v. 22; lust, v. 28; hatred of enemies,

v. 44, 46. On Judgment Day, God will place all actions in the context of our motives, 1 Corinthians 4:5. And also in the context of how much we have been sheltered from the temptations faced by others whom we are tempted to judge, Luke 12:47-48. In other words, as we commend ourselves for being incapable of the evil we despise in others, God calculates how many of those evils we would have embraced after all, had we faced the same temptations as those we judge!

Is more confession than that called for by these passages? Should there be a ritual, or regular scheduled time of confession on our meeting agenda? Should we confess everything? To everybody?

Catholics have a “confessional”, a physically dark place where a “penitent” can confess the week’s sins to a priest behind a dark screen and be “absolved” of them. That level of responsibility taken for one’s actions should merit some respect from Protestants for at least being better than the nothing experienced by many Protestants. It is far cheaper, and far better, than the psychiatrist’s couches rented by Protestants. (And by many Catholics.)

A widely acknowledged abuse of the system is to indulge lusts without concern for consequences, expecting that the next day’s confession will magically wipe them out; but surely as many Protestants presume the same license in God’s Grace, despite the warning of Romans 6:1-2 against that very absurdity, without confessing anything to anybody.

But the verse says confess to “one another”. Such confession would be a great antidote for arrogance and hypocrisy. Anonymity leaves sinners with the burden of a public “image” painfully better than reality. Even more so for clergy, according to articles written by clergy which complain of the great loneliness of guilt which clergymen dare not confess generally to the laymen hiring them.

But does “confess ye your faults one to another” mean every fault, to everyone? It would seem wise to avoid revealing our faults to a “talebearer”, Proverbs 26:20-22. But

it would be a blessing to find a sympathetic ear in a heart of love, Proverbs 17:9.

In any case, confession of our own failings, as the need arises to comfort another whose failings we seek to heal, seems very useful, both to assure another that we do not judge but sympathize, and to encourage him that if we can overcome, so can he.

Psalm 23. A shepherd's rod is his long heavy stick for whacking predators. His staff, with its hook on the end, is what he uses to pull straying sheep back to safety. God protects us from destruction, and yanks us back from foolishness, through other humans when they are willing. As much self discipline as it takes to love correction, it is easier to take from other humans than from God, as Job 33:6-7 explains (compare with 9:32-35).

"Comfort" is indispensable to Christian fellowship where there is any "correction". (1 Corinthians 14:3) But not some shallow comfort that fades in proportion to disagreement. The love God calls us to reaches to our enemies.

Few of your enemies can ever hurt you, or cost you, as much as your own children, yet you still love your children. So your enemies should be easy to love.

The James 3 Checklist. God's wisdom is recognized by its consistency with the Bible and with reality ("pure"), friendliness ("peaceable"), gentleness ("gentle"), readiness to reason ("easy to be intreated"), readiness to forgive ("full of mercy"), readiness to move beyond talk to action ("full of good fruits"), impartiality ("without partiality"), and consistency with one's stated principles and lifestyle ("without hypocrisy").

**4b Don't tear down
relationships with your
temper and tongue. Build
them with truth, service,
and forgiveness**

Philippians 2:3 [Do] nothing in rivalry [Greek: intrigue] or vain-glory, but in humility of mind one another counting more excellent than yourselves— 4 each not to your own look ye, but each also to the things of others. (YLT)

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers....31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors....14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (See also Matt 18)

**4c “Personal attacks” -
clever insults timed to draw
attention from an unwanted
message to the sins of the
messenger – separate us
from each other and from
our goals**

Exodus 32:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. 11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and [listed reasons to save Israel].... 14 And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Luke 4:41 And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God.... (See also Matthew 8:29, Luke 4:34, Mark 1:34, 3:11, Acts 16:17-18, James 2:19)

The essence of what we call a “personal attack” is the assumption that if we can discredit a messenger because of his sins, we can get out of listening to his message, no matter how credible his message would be were it judged on its own merits.

What man is so arrogant that he may regard any other human as not worth listening to because of his sins, when *God* hears his prayers and offers to change history in response? Are we so much higher than that poor sinner, than God is? God hears *our* prayers. Is the spiritual gap between ourselves and that poor sinner greater than the gap between God and ourselves?

God listened to Moses and changed history.

Even devils “preach” what many of us would consider “the Gospel”, proving *anyone* might say something God can use. And they typically speak with more conviction and eloquence, and more publicly, than most of us.

God offers to listen to all of us and change history to the extent our prayers have merit. Jesus listened to Satan in Job 1 and Matthew 4. In Job 1 He even answered Satan’s prayer! How *dare* any of us not listen to each other because of our mere mutual guilt!

Certainly there is such a thing as trust earned. Honest researchers whose work we have verified in the past merit less suspicion and scrutiny in the future.

But we should trust no man so completely that we require of him no evidence or reasoning. Nor should we *mistrust* any man so completely that we will not even listen to his reasoning or evidence.

Although we may be justified in limiting the time we commit to listening to people with a poor reliability track record, when we do listen we need to weigh their words on their merits, not on their source.

If ever there was a messenger questionable enough to make his message not worth listening to, and a man so righteous that he shouldn’t have had to listen to any sinner, it was a tyrant whom God had said not to rely on, telling the

most righteous king in all Israel's history, that he had a message for the king from God!

That's what the pagan foreign dictator, Pharaoh-Necho, a man normally not to be trusted according to Isaiah 30:1-3, told the most righteous king of Israel, Josiah, 2 Kings 23:25. Josiah died because he would not listen to Pharaoh-Necho's warning, through whom God had chosen, that time, to speak! 2 Chronicles 35:20-25. This is a sober warning to us not to dismiss *anyone* as not worth listening to.

But is there a Biblical argument saying we shouldn't listen to people whom we can successfully charge with sin? How about the rest of that verse quoted above: *Luke 4:41 And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.*

Why did Jesus silence their "preaching" of what most of us would consider the "Gospel"? Bible commentaries are divided. *Patrick Gill* says "for he needed not their testimony, nor did he choose to be made known by them". If *Gill* is right, that would be an argument for "personal attacks"!

Geneva agrees with *Gill*: "Satan, who is a continual enemy of the truth, ought not to be heard, not even when he speaks the truth."

But *Albert Barnes* speculates that it was the timing: "Jesus was not desirous at that time that that should be publicly known, or that his name should be blazoned abroad. The time had not come when he wished it to be promulgated that he was the Messiah..."

Matthew Henry offers a rather strange theory that the devils were tortured into their confessions – "they said it crying with rage and indignation; it was a confession upon the rack, and therefore was not admitted in evidence." (The "rack" was a device of torture that stretched people to death.) A more credible theory was "that it might appear, beyond all contradiction, that he had obtained a conquest over them, and not made a compact with them."

But I notice that the verses don't say Jesus stopped them from acknowledging Him. They say the devils did acknowledge Him! *Then* they say Jesus silenced them. Meaning, apparently, from blathering on indefinitely – Jesus wanted them out of there, and the people delivered.

Personal attacks find no justification here.

4d The cost of a position is not a reason to avoid it

Titus 1:11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's [Gr: money] sake.

1 John 4:6 But we are children of God; that is why only those who have walked and talked with God will listen to us. Others won't. That is another way to know if a message is really from God; for if it is, the world won't listen to it. (The Book)

When a conclusion or evidence that is costly to accept is avoided without evidence that it is not credible or useful, it is time to examine our hearts.

A.W. Pink, writing in "Gleanings from Joshua", gives examples from the Bible showing how the closer one is to God, the fewer even of God's children, who are not that close to God, that will listen to him and stand with him:

"It is this very loneliness of the saint that serves to make manifest the genuineness of his faith. There is nothing remarkable in one believing what all his associates believe, but to have faith when surrounded by skeptics, is something noteworthy. To stand alone, to be the solitary champion of a righteous cause when all others are federated unto evil, is a rare sight. Yet such was Rahab. There were none in Jericho with whom she could have fellowship, none there to encourage her heart and strengthen her hands by their godly counsel and example: all the more opportunity for her to prove the sufficiency of Divine grace! Scan slowly the list presented in Hebrews 11, and then recall the recorded circumstances of each. With whom did Abel, Enoch, Noah

have spiritual communion? From what brethren did Joseph, Moses, Gideon receive any help along the way? Who were the ones who encouraged and emboldened Elijah, Daniel, Nehemiah? Then think it not strange that you are called to walk almost if not entirely alone, that you meet with scarcely any like-minded or any who are capable of giving you a lift along the road.”

Although this reflection is an encouragement to us when others won't listen to our evidence no matter how carefully we document it or how patiently we present it, it is not a compliment to us when we don't patiently investigate the claims of others. Our natural human aversion to thinking hard, that causes God's finest to be ignored, it is not a good thing. It is a failure that keeps the world from God's greatest blessings, and that keeps us from opening God's best gifts to us: His answers to our prayers.

It is a fact that greater things are accomplished by people working together, than by people left to struggle alone. Greater wisdom is available to a “multitude of counselors” reasoning together, Proverbs 15:22. Yet it is precisely this power of prayer-led cooperation which is lost when saints holding the most righteous assaults against the most evil “mountains”, which by definition are the costliest assaults to support, are marginalized, abandoned, and deserted because supporting them is costly: we get splattered with some of the mud thrown at them.

4e A confusing message should be interrupted with a request or attempt to clarify, to keep the message from being interrupted by confusion

1 Corinthians 14:8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? 9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

Luke 1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?...45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Titus 1:10 For there are many unruly and vain [Gr: senseless, or mischievous] talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

1 Corinthians 14 shows God's concern about precious discussion time squandered by a confusing message. Luke 1

shows God’s appreciation of a request for clarification, even from an angel.

“Vain talkers” describes, among probably many things, those who do not make sense, or who use words to harass. The most pure-hearted Christians don’t always make sense. Less pure-hearted Christians may behave most of the time, but be tempted by the audio power of a microphone to relish power for its own sake rather than for the sake of promoting truth.

Titus is warned that “circumcision” was a particularly common magnet for “vain talkers”. “Circumcision”, back then, was the issue over which Jewish authorities were most likely to persecute Christians; it corresponds to “controversies” today. Then, the “uncircumcised” “rocked the boat (of comfortably shallow social relationships)” as much as the “controversial” (whose Light-Shining, Mountain-Baptizing actions are costly) do today. Fear of cost motivates many to ramble nervously, deliberately trying to mire a “controversial” message in confusion.

Whatever the cause of a confusing message, any respectful, brief interruption that can clarify it is as helpful to the speaker as to everyone else, assuming the speaker is honest and not deliberately trying to confuse. As for suspicions about hidden motives, they may be something to watch for if a message can’t be made sense of in any other way, but don’t explore motives to discount a message whose logic and evidence stands on its own; that would be a “personal attack”.

Not all interruption is rude. **Some interruption prevents interruption, and is for the benefit of the speaker.**

Mary did not question God’s power to do the impossible, as Zechariah did 6 months earlier or Sarai 2,000 years earlier. She simply asked how it would happen. She was not in doubt; she was confused, which the angel respected, so the angel explained.

4f Arguable generalizations are confusing

1 Corinthians 14:8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? 9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

James 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Generalizations are appropriate among people who agree about the specific instances that are collected together into the generalization. Where there is not agreement about the premises of a generalization, generalizations and worse - exaggerations - can only confuse, if not exasperate.

Solving problems, especially problems as big as mountains, requires wisdom. Wisdom requires precise information. Generalizations are useful as an overview of established facts. When the facts are arguable, they need to be established before a generalization about them can be useful.

Criticisms. A temptation, when we criticize, is to think it important to remember only what the other guy did wrong, and not bother to recall when and where it was, or the evidence that proves he really did what we think he did, or the reasoning by which we can prove the offending words or

deeds were actually wrong.

Another temptation we have is to enhance our allegation by calling it a general pattern rather than a single incident or two; because if it only happened once or twice, it wouldn't be that big a deal: but when we say "he always does it" then the guy must be a real jerk.

So we generalize. We accuse, "You never listen to anybody." But because we do not provide a single instance of when and where this has occurred, the person we criticize (1) can't remember a single time he committed the alleged offense; (2) knows it cannot be true that he "always" commits the alleged offense; and (3) wonders whether, if he knew what incident triggered the criticism, he would agree it would have been an offense, even if it had happened.

He cannot respond to us, because he has no idea what we are talking about.

(Perhaps we are happy that he can't answer us, because then we can flatter ourselves that our wisdom is so airtight, it is irrefutable!)

When our criticism is too general to be understood or answered, our speech becomes as dark and filthy and profane as if we were simply cursing. In fact, **cursing is the spirit of imprecise criticism**: our speech conveys no more useful information than cursing; our speech conveys only our frustration and rage, which is all that profanity conveys.

Our anger further complicates our victim's attempts to understand us. His efforts to learn the details of our criticism from us are met with our further generalizations and allegations, which add to the heap crying out for rectification.

America's Bill of Rights provides that each person charged with a crime shall be given a "Bill of Particulars" explaining when and where the crime is alleged to have been committed, and what law defines it as a crime. To do less, that is, to generalize, is to deprive the accused of either the right to defend himself, if the allegation is unfounded, or to repent, if the allegation is founded!

Many of us say we don't mind being criticized, but then

others wonder why we appear to resist criticism when we get it. Although clear, concise, and irrefutable criticism has its own discomforts, criticism, of all the communications experienced by a church which dares to pass the mike, (or experienced by any marriage which hopes to last) must be specific enough to be understandable.

Accusatory generalizations about people not present. A group is unlikely to object to an unsupported generalization that accuses a common enemy who isn't present to defend himself. But it should. Were the purpose only to exult in self righteousness like the Pharisee thanking God that he is not like that nasty Publican over there, that purpose would be well served. But if the purpose is preparation for confronting error in love in order to heal, arguable generalizations cripple our progress towards that goal.

4g Interrupt reasoning from an unproved premise

1 Corinthians 5:9 In my letter to you I told you not to associate with people who continue to commit sexual sins. 10 I didn't tell you that you could not have any contact with unbelievers who commit sexual sins, are greedy, are dishonest, or worship false gods. If that were the case, you would have to leave this world. 11 Now, what I meant was that you should not associate with people who call themselves brothers or sisters in the Christian faith but live in sexual sin, are greedy, worship false gods, use abusive language, get drunk, or are dishonest. Don't eat with such people. 12 After all, do I have any business judging those who are outside the Christian faith? Isn't it your business to judge those who are inside? 13 God will judge those who are outside. Remove that wicked man from among you.

Matthew 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. 25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: 26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? 27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do

your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

Paul heard that **the Corinthians** were turning into hermits. They weren't interacting with unbelievers. What had happened to their zeal for sharing the Gospel? Paul had to get to the bottom of it. ("Getting to the bottom of" a misunderstanding is an English idiom meaning to figure out the mistaken premise upon which the misunderstanding is based.)

He asked messengers, and found out the "ingrowing" was because of how they interpreted Paul's own previous letter! Paul had written to them to *distinguish* themselves from prostitutes and playboys; the people thought Paul meant even those who were never identified with the Christian faith in the first place. Kind of silly: how do you "disassociate" yourself from people with whom you have never been "associated"?

Paul "interrupted" the hermit conduct by clarifying the premise upon which it was based. He said the "distinguishing" he was talking about only applied to those with whom they were "identified", whose behavior was radically distinct from Christian behavior yet who told everyone they were "Christians". To go along with such a fraud would certainly confuse the pagan public about how Christians are expected to behave. There was no danger that witnessing to pagans would create that confusion, because in the first place, before they are converted they do not call themselves "Christians", and in the second place, because before they are converted they more likely publicly complain that the Christians are harassing them.

What was **the Pharisees'** premise, upon which they

reasoned that Jesus' power to cast out demons came from Satan? Was it that Jesus couldn't possibly conduct the power of God? It is unlikely the Pharisees were very persuasive anyway, although few dared say so.

Jesus "interrupted" their false accusations by identifying and refuting their premise. Satan only promotes suicide for humans, not for himself.

It is our mission to "get to the bottom of" misunderstandings by identifying and correcting erroneous premises. Because unidentified mistaken premises breed confusion, and God is not the author of confusion.

The Corinthians made an honest mistake, due to inexperience and an innocent lapse of logic. The Pharisees made a mistake driven by rage which blinded them to their own irrationality. Most misunderstandings in Christian forums will fall somewhere between those extremes. In any case, if a speaker's argument seems to be based on a premise probably not shared by the group, then to let him continue uncorrected wastes everyone's time including the speaker's. He should be informed that to have any opportunity to persuade, he will need to back up and support his premise.

Here is an example of how to explain it: "Excuse me, but your argument appears to be based on the premise that which I do not share, and which I suspect others do not share. Therefore, if you continue building your argument, without offering evidence for the premise upon which it is based, you may be wasting the group's time with an argument which cannot persuade. Therefore I respectfully request, if there is no objection from the group, that you back up and persuade us of the validity of your premise before you proceed to build your argument on it."

This is a different problem than the "Jewish fables" problem mentioned later. In that situation, the entire group is warned to beware of getting caught up in allegations without evidence, and there is no train of logic which hinges on acceptance of the allegation. In this situation, only the speaker is careless about evidence, and there is a train of

logic which will go nowhere without evidence for its premise, just as a train will go nowhere without fuel for its engine.

4^h A speaker repeating himself should finish his point and sit down

Matthew 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

Time Limits: How long a speaker may keep the floor (keep talking).

A group selects a subject after listening to proposals. Primary speakers on the subject (like panelists for a panel discussion) are identified, who are prepared to contribute significantly to the subject. A time is allotted to the subject, but within that time, there may be time allotted to individual speakers. Or a “panel” may be set up, where two or three have an exchange of ideas for an allotted time, and then there is an allotted time for interaction with everybody else, with questions and comments led by everyone BUT the panelists.

But if a discussion is not that organized by the clock, what restraint should we have on an individual who dominates the conversation by mere vocal volume and impertinence in interrupting?

Even supposing the speaker suffers none of the above offenses that justify being stopped, shall there be a limit to his speech, in the absence of clocked statements?

God says when God reveals something to someone, let the speaker sit down. When someone else stands to speak, let the speaker wrap up his point with no further redundancy and sit down. He needs to allow others to interact, as a measure of whether his message is getting through, if nothing else. He will have another chance to stand after the interloper finishes, but if too many others stand and he feels he didn't get enough time to say what needed to be said during the meeting, there is always communication outside the meeting, or even written handouts at the next meeting.

Let the speaker watch faces, and notice changes responsive to his words which indicate interest in responding. Let each speaker be aware of what percentage of the group's time he is speaking, and be especially ready to stop if he has spoken much and the one ready to speak has said little. Let not the speaker imagine his point will be carried with a mere quantity of words.

Let the speaker realize that part of persuasion is addressing the objections of listeners. If listeners are unable to fully express their objections, listeners will tune out a speaker who will not address them but will only keep repeating the same points over and over. The latter strategy actually works if you are on a panel on a TV interview show and you want, in your four minutes, your arguments to be best remembered by the TV audience. The approach actually persuades a neutral audience who is unaware of the objections. But those who understand the objections are the last to be persuaded. This approach, therefore, in a small group devoted to striving towards unity in thought and action, actually perpetuates division, by wasting precious

time needed for people to reason with one another.

For the rude participant disrespectful enough of the rest to continue harassing them after they have made known their disinterest in any more of a particular subject, a unanimous vote to silence may help; and if that is ignored, and harassment continues to disrupt the meeting, physical expulsion may be necessary, with unanimous consent.

Here is an example of a message to such a person to which everyone could agree, through a unanimous vote:

“We want you to remain with us, but all of us want you also to submit to the condition: that when you repeat yourself so much that our group time is wasted, and when we vote unanimously that it is time for you to stop talking so that we may move on, that you will be quiet.

“We have been through steps one and two of Matthew 18:15-16, and this vote announces our intention to invoke verse 17, if necessary.

“If you will not submit to this condition, then, for as long as you will not, you are not welcome at our meetings.

“Here is how we will handle it: any of us may ask for a vote if we feel conviction that you are either (1) repeating yourself, going in circles, unresponsive to our answers, and will not stop; or (2) you are rambling so much that we cannot follow your point, and we cannot get you to explain yourself; or (3) you are badgering us with issues which you refuse to defend in a televised forum where we have the time to thoroughly respond, but instead, like a terrorist, you “hit and run” while we think we are at peace, sniping at us.

“Here is an example of how we may say it: ‘I ask unanimous consent to stop you from (repeating yourself) (rambling unintelligibly) (hit-and-run sniping).’

“If our vote is not at least 80%, you may continue talking. But if the vote is between 80% and 100%, or if only one or two want to hear you talk, you may go with them into another room, or outside, to finish your point, and then come in and rejoin us. If you bring friends to supply this vote, we reserve the right to amend this paragraph.

“Please notice that it is not your position on any issue which forces us to this action, but your [endless repetition], [obscure rambling], [verbal guerilla warfare] while refusing honest debate.

“We also reserve the right to take into account, in keeping our welcome open to you, your violation of these principles when you call us, individually, at home.

“Ecclesiastes 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice is known by multitude of words.”

4i **Back up your claims.**

John 10:34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? 35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; [accused of error] 36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Matthew 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets

Matthew 11:16 You people are like children sitting in the market and shouting to each other, 17 “We played the flute, but you would not dance! We sang a funeral song, but you would not mourn!” 18 John the Baptist did not go around eating and drinking, and you said, “That man has a demon in him!” 19 But the Son of Man goes around eating and drinking, and you say, “That man eats and drinks too much! He is even a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” Yet Wisdom is shown to be right by what it does. (AFV version)

Jesus and New Testament writers cited the Old Testament for authority 63 times, beginning “It is written”. If even they accepted the need to back up what they said, so should we!

When you can, back up your claims with sources respected by the people you are trying to persuade, as Jesus did when accused of a “death sentence” crime, and Paul did on Mars’ Hill. Acts 17.

The strongest evidence that someone is guilty is his own words, whether or not he intended to admit guilt, as Jesus demonstrated with the Pharisees’ admission that they were descended from the murderers of prophets.

It takes hard work, lots of study, intense concentration, and testing by subjecting your theories to the scrutiny of the best experts you can find, to document an important original solution. For people that serious about being helpful, the equally difficult challenge will be getting others to scrutinize your evidence. Which will not be short, if it is truly helpful. Yet one must always be ready to back up one’s hope, whether it is the great Hope of Eternal Life or the small hope of some “Good Work” God has offered you as your mission. Because at some point good ideas will be scrutinized. One must be ready.

Not even Jesus backed up his statements with “because I said so, and I am God, so shut up!” Neither should we expect to persuade anyone that some disputed fact is true, without backing it up – citing some authority that is trusted by those who dispute it. It is hard enough to get people who disagree to look at your evidence even when you offer it, but some will. No one will, if you offer none. If you can’t figure out what authorities your adversary trusts, you have the opportunity, here, to ask.

Jesus and New Testament writers cited the Old Testament for authority 63 times, beginning “It is written”: Matthew 2:5; 4:4,6,7,10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24,31; Mark 1:2; 7:6; 9:12,13; 14:21,27; Luke 2:23; 3:4; 4:4,8,10; 7:27; 19:46; 24:46; John 6:31,45; 12:14; Acts 1:20; 7:42; 15:15; 23:5; Romans 1:17; 2:24; 3:4,10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13,33; 10:15; 11:8,26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3,9,21; 1 Corinthians 1:19,31; 2:9; 3:19; 9:9; 10:7; 14:21; 15:45; 2 Corinthians 4:13; 8:15; 9:9; Galatians 3:10,13; 4:22,27; Hebrews 10:7; 1 Peter 1:16

If not even Jesus relied on his own Words for authority,

but quoted “YOUR OWN law” to back up what He said, who are we to rely for authority only on what makes perfect sense to ourselves, and expect to persuade anybody?

Consider Jesus’ emphasis: he didn’t just quote “God’s law” to back Himself up. He said in essence, “YOUR OWN law backs me up. The law YOU claim gives you your authority to question Me. The law whose every word YOU believe is true.”

In other words, Jesus, though He *is* God, did not rely on the authority of His own words to back up His argument to them, because they refused to receive Him as God. He did not even say he was quoting the Bible because it is the Word of God, but, he said, because it was “*your* law”. It was what *they* regarded as their supreme authority.

If we apply that principle, we won’t quote the New York Times to prove a point to a conservative, and we won’t quote Rush Limbaugh to back up our argument to a liberal.

Too often, though, people are simply unreasonable, and refuse to be persuaded, no matter the evidence. This is not just true of unbelievers; Bible believers can be slow to accept an unwelcome Bible verse. Jesus described His frustration with people who are against anything that makes sense, even when that requires saying the opposite of what they did a minute ago. In Matthew 11 He describes what we call today “damned if you do, damned if you don’t”; aka a “Catch 22”.

We can still try to learn what the person we are addressing accepts as authority, if there is anything at all, and back up our points from it, and pray for a mind to open.

Likewise, we can quote the Bible to back up our argument to a Christian, but not so easily to an atheist who tells himself he doesn’t believe the Bible. The relevant reason to quote the Bible to an atheist might be to show how some principle or fact he believes, like for example freedom of speech and religion or a vote for all, is pioneered in the Bible, but not as authority to back up a point. But as noted, quoting the Bible to a Bible believer is no guarantee one will be persuasive. We are humans, most of us. We have to be

patient.

(If you are an atheist, reading this, don't be afraid that you will be required to follow these principles *because they are in the Bible*. We *recommend* you follow these principles *because they make sense*, and will benefit *your* efforts to persuade. Christian readers will benefit more from these verses than you will. If you can find some authority to back up your arguments better than the Bible, go for it. You won't be censored. Likewise you won't be allowed to censor quotes from the Bible to back up relevant points.)

The New Testament was written mostly to people who accepted the Bible as authority. But there was one audience which did not. When Paul addressed that audience, He did not quote the Bible, but authorities they respected. However, after pointing out inconsistency in their own authorities, Paul went on to point out the resolution offered by Jesus:

Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. 29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. 30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Corollary: Don't allege what you can't back up, or that no one could do anything about even if it were true.

This rule is for people making a claim. The next rule is for those listening to a claim.

4j Don't Rush to Judgment: hear the evidence from all sides

Proverbs 18:13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

John 7:50 Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) 51 Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?

Acts 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These [Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Listening to all evidence before drawing your conclusion is so honored by God, that God even listens to mere man - *even though He already knows everything anyway!!* And God changes history according to our requests. [Examples: Exodus 32:9-14, Matthew 15:22-28, Isaiah 38:1-9, Isaiah 39] Well, the ability He grants us to move mountains into seas certainly changes geography.

If God is willing to listen even to us, we surely cannot be above listening to each other.

Proverbs 18:13, applied to discussion, says it is a “folly and a shame” for a group to adopt a position on a controversy before it has heard all the evidence for and against from concerned members.

And even then, all positions must be regarded as tentative enough to leave open the door for future evidence, since we are human and are hardly omniscient.

Also: an accusation against someone must not be believed before his defense has been patiently and fairly heard.

Listening to all the evidence takes time! It takes work! It takes study! But little is more “noble”.

Yet opportunity often comes disguised as hard work. Telling yourself you don’t care enough to do that work, or that you will leave it for someone with more time, or more expertise, is a decision to let a mountain of evil stand which God may have given you the power to help pull down.

We need to be like the Bereans, whom God calls “noble” because they did not just believe whatever was told them, nor did they reject out of hand what Paul told them, but they immediately tested what they were told by Scripture. They were suspicious enough of Paul to test him, but suspicious enough of their own suspicions to test their suspicions too.

To do otherwise is not only to fall headlong into error, and to abandon the role offered us in Heaven, but to follow in the steps of Satan.

4k Skepticism is a good motivator to examine evidence, but an evil excuse to not bother checking evidence

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

Titus 2:3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

John 20:24 Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, who was called Didymus, wasn't with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord." Thomas told them, "I refuse to believe this unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my fingers into them, and put my hand into his side." 26 A week later Jesus' disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put

your finger here, and look at my hands. Take your hand, and put it into my side. Stop doubting, and believe.” 28 Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to Thomas, “You believe because you’ve seen me. Blessed are those who haven’t seen me but believe.” (GW translation)

Skepticism helps when it identifies assumptions that need to be checked, if it comes with a Berean commitment to research facts, and if it is equally vigilant to check one’s own prejudices. Suspicion without this, suspicious of evidence, stoked for its entertainment value, starts wars, keeps America divided, unable to heal, and resistant to revival, keeping out salvation and the Kingdom of God.

Thomas was so skeptical that he chose to remain unpersuaded by overwhelming evidence; he demanded still more. But at least his evidentiary demand was sincere: when he got it, he no longer doubted but went on to India to share the Gospel at the cost of his life.

God doesn’t mind providing evidence to those who will acknowledge it and conform their lives to the reality it reveals. Beware of being one of those skeptics today who treat evidence as something to dodge in order to keep on accusing. That is the way of Satan. That way leads to Hell. That way *is* Hell.

41 Admit conflicts of interest

Titus 1:10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

Micah 3:10 You make cruelty and murder a way of life in Jerusalem. 11 You leaders accept bribes for dishonest decisions. You priests and prophets teach and preach, but only for money. Then you say, "The LORD is on our side. No harm will come to us." (AFV)

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an hireling, [who works for a wage] and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, [who doesn't own the sheep] seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

Exodus 23:8 And thou shalt take no gift: [bribe, when you judge] for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.

Deuteronomy 16:19 Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

Proverbs 17:23 A wicked man taketh a gift out of the

bosom [a bribe in secret] to pervert the ways of judgment.

It is not wrong for someone with a personal interest in the outcome of a discussion to have a voice in the discussion, but it is true that some discussions have important personal consequences for some Christians which are not always clear to others in a discussion, and it is misleading to hide those personal interests.

A Christian may fear harm to his own business from association with a group taking controversial action. He might fear a lawsuit which could jeopardize his own assets. Should group action result in arrests he might fear for his own employment future with that on his resume.

Understanding personal interests helps others evaluate another's testimony. Personal interests can color one's judgment. On the other hand, personal interests tend to increase one's expertise on a subject.

Judges in American courts "recuse" (remove) themselves from cases in which they hold a personal interest, since litigants want impartiality in a judge. In the United States today, laws against bribes are comprehensive and heavily enforced, thanks to the influence of the Bible on our culture.

In 2020 when four city councilmen were arrested for bribery it was a rare enough event that it was national [news](#). (Although when bribery schemes reach high enough by people loved enough, the [public is divided](#) about what action to take.)

www.toledoblade.com/local/police-fire/2020/06/30/Federal-agents-take-Toledo-city-council-members-into-custody-amid-bribery-probe/stories/20200630090

www.observer.com/2016/08/the-clinton-foundations-global-bribery-and-crony-access-scam/

Christians likewise, when they meet and strategize, should be honest with each other about when their concerns about a project are colored by the effect they think it might have on themselves.

Part 5: Discipline:

“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 1 Cor 14:32

5a No one is required to believe the Bible

Although the Bible must not be censored when its wisdom and authority are considered by some participants as relevant to the strategies discussed. But no one should be required to believe it. This is not just a common sense principle already practiced in American secular meetings: it is even a Biblical principle. The Scriptures below show that doctrinal tests are improper prerequisites for participation in any Christian meeting.

1 Corinthians 14:24 (BBE) But if all are teaching as prophets, and a man without faith or knowledge comes in, he is tested [KJV: convinced. Greek: ελεγχω confuted/refuted/corrected] by all, he is judged [Greek:

ανακρινῶ, scrutinized, interrogated] by all; 25 (ERV) The secret things in their heart will be made known. So they will bow down and worship God. They will say, “Without a doubt, God is here with you.”

1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

1 Corinthians 14 makes clear that unbelievers are welcome in Christian meetings. That of course is the practice of every Christian church. It is also the practice of every Christian church that in meetings where conversation is allowed for members, it is also allowed for visitors, including unbelievers. Of course in the primary meetings, conversation is generally not allowed for anyone.

1 Corinthians 14 makes clear that unbelieving visitors will be invited into the conversation, and that it is their own answers to questions that will expose anything their hearts are hiding as Christians following God’s discussion rules reach out in love.

1 Corinthians 5 underlines the fact that unbelief is not a basis for restriction of fellowship; therefore, unbelievers are invited by Scripture to be full participants in Christian meetings. Therefore, no doctrinal test - no set of doctrines one must agree to - can be a condition for participation.

Is unbelief a bar to formal church membership? The Bible does not say, because the Bible mentions no formal church membership. All the Christians in a city are called “the church” of that city.

Deliberate, persistent violation of a group's rules justifies a restriction on one's participation, but that is as possible for believers as for unbelievers.

5b Expose deceivers and dividers by group analysis of their inconsistencies

In this section are several passages popularly cited to justify “excommunication”. Notice that none of them authorize church leaders to burn Christians at the stake for “heresy”. That dark chapter of Church history had zero Biblical support.

Time needs to be spent digesting these passages, because to this day careless attention to them has made them excuses for division and not working together – not even communicating – “*ex-communication*”.

What some of these passages do authorize is consensus about the problem created by a participant. Consensus of course has to be established through discussion. Once consensus is established, these passages do not authorize church police to refuse admittance to the offender, much less to torture the offender. It merely clarifies for everyone that the problem they suspected is real, and it establishes agreement about the most effective route to reconciliation.

It nips in the bud any further division caused by the offender by talking “behind people’s backs” - that is, accusing people who aren’t there to defend themselves, while pretending to be friendly to their victims’ faces. That stops working for the troublemaker, when the group starts “comparing notes” about what the troublemaker told different people. It exposes deception, thus ending it.

But what if this is not enough to stop disruption? What if he violates discussion rules? Should the ushers be empowered to physically drag a troublemaker outside? What

if he pulls out a gun and starts shooting people? Why doesn't the Bible tell us?

Perhaps because after the first Christians tried the techniques God gave them, there remained no need for physical coercion. Although 1 Corinthians 6 does authorize us to judge our internal affairs, and Moses' criminal laws include great precedents for handling violence.

Where there is concern about physical violence not from participants but from criminal "protesters" streaming in from outside, security/bodyguards certainly makes sense to us ordinary humans. We are charged to protect people from slaughter, especially when we can anticipate when it might come:

Proverbs 24:10 If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. 11 If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; 12 If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?

What makes disagreement exasperating is when someone argues positions he doesn't really believe, just to be difficult, and looks at contrary evidence like a dog looks at a bush. Or gossips about people "behind their back", meaning where they can't hear the accusation against them so they can defend themselves.

Conversation monkeywrenches like these can be neutralized by openly discussing discrepancies in a person's statements. Why do his positions seem to be a moving target, changing subtly from one day to the next? We can simply ask him to clarify. We can ask gently, with an attitude of hope that he can. Gossip can be neutralized by simply arranging a meeting between the gossip and his target, while we mediate, as in step #2 of Matthew 18:15-17. If the gossip has omitted step #1, so that his target had no idea he was making such accusations, we will immediately find out.

At least that is the intended application of the

Scriptures below, according to the analysis which follows, which addresses traditional interpretations of these verses, which are quite different than the conclusion here.

Romans 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be...9 able by sound doctrine [teaching] both to exhort and to convince [refute] the gainsayers [those who oppose sound teaching]. 10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. ... 13 ...rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; 14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

2 John 1:7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist....10 If there come any unto you, [who want to identify themselves as fellow believers], and bring not this doctrine, (this teaching, that Jesus is come in the flesh), receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

Divisions and Offenses. The traditional interpretation is that doctrines contrary to Paul's doctrines cause "divisions" and are "offenses". So we need to divide from those dividers. Numerous denominations have split off from each other on the theory that their leader's theology must be

the mirror image of Paul's doctrines, so therefore disagreement with their theology must be "divisive" and an "offense", requiring us to separate from folks who disagree with us.

But consider that "doctrines" didn't mean, when God wrote the Bible, what we call "doctrines" today. Today, what we call "doctrines" are very short summaries of Biblical principles treated as more important than other Bible teachings, with which we require others to believe before we will worship God with them. Then, the Greek word we translate "doctrines" simply meant "teaching", without indicating *which* teachings.

But context can tell us which teachings are meant by "the doctrine [teachings] which ye have learned". Here, the context is "divisions and offenses".

Read 1 Corinthians 1 to learn what Paul thought of divisions! In chapter 3 he called them a bunch of crybabies clamoring for their milk because they were splitting into four denominations! In chapter 11 Paul said their "divisions" were the reason some of them were dying. In chapter 12 Paul taught them how essential unity is among Christians: as essential as it is for the limbs of a physical body to stay on it! In Chapter 13 Paul taught them about love. In chapter 14 Paul taught them how to all listen to each other when they meet.

"Offenses" translates the Greek word σκάνδαλα, "scandal" with a leftover "a", which describes a "stumbling stone" such as a rock that has fallen into a mountain path, blocking the path, forcing the traveler to turn back. That's why it is a terrible sin to "offend one of these little ones which believe in me", Matthew 18:6, yet Christ Himself is called a "chief corner stone" and "stone of stumbling"! We need to try to turn back those headed for Hell, but woe to those who turn back those headed for Heaven!

1 Peter 2:6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be

confounded. 7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

The Connection between Divisiveness and Fraud.

Titus 1:7-14 says “deceivers” (v. 10) “subvert” (or divide; v. 11) people. 2 John likewise identifies “deceivers” as those from whom we should distinguish ourselves. Titus says one of the qualifications to look for in an Elder (KJV “Bishop”; King James ordered his translators to use “ecclesiastical words”) is the ability to refute those who resist sound teaching. Titus is told that if they are “rebuked” well, they may become “sound in the faith” (v. 13).

So Paul said when someone is using deception to divide people, the whole group should establish the facts of the deception, in order to avoid being deceived any longer.

That isn’t accomplished by division. Division is not a Biblical goal.

We must sometimes discipline. We must never stop reasoning

Even those we must discipline, we must still reason with, as they will allow, prayerfully, praying for reconciliation. Let us never be comfortable with the loss of a friendship.

The word “ex-communication” means stopping communication, and that is how it has been practiced. That practice has been supported by traditional interpretations of verses like those below. But “excommunication” is not a word in the Bible, and the verses below require the opposite of the traditional practice! These verses require the opposite of the arrogant gloating known to accompany “excommunication”; gloating that another has committed so grave an error as to justify our censure of him! This is not the way we build unity! This is not the way we accomplish great good!

And as Proverbs 24 informs us, God doesn’t like it.

1 Corinthians 11:17 Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

Proverbs 24:17 Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: 18 Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.

The traditional, or common interpretation of this passage in 1 Corinthians 11 is that the “divisions” that Paul rebukes are disagreement with formal church doctrines which you have to believe in order to be saved: so therefore we need to separate ourselves from people who disagree, by excommunicating them - “*ex*”-“communicating” – no longer communicating with them.

But the meaning of the Greek words is nearly the opposite! They mean the people we must guard ourselves against are the people who divide Christians into denominations over sincerely held disagreement. Paul did NOT like denominations! Just read chapter one, and then read the first verses of chapter 3 where Paul compares their divisiveness with a bunch of crybabies clamoring for their milk!

“Heresy” today means an unacceptably wrong belief - so wrong it will pull people to Hell. But the word in the Bible means division, or the sect/denomination that results from division. Bible commentator Albert Barnes explains:

Albert Barnes on 1 Corinthians 11:19”

“For there must be - It is necessary (δεῖ δεῖ); it is to be expected; there are reasons why there should be. What these

reasons are he states in the close of the verse; compare Mat_18:7; 2Pe_2:1; 2Pe_2:2. The meaning is, not that divisions are inseparable from the nature of the Christian religion, not that it is the design and wish of the Author of Christianity that they should exist, and not that they are physically impossible, for then they could not be the subject of blame; but that such is human nature, such are the corrupt passions of men, the propensity to ambition and strifes, that they are to be expected, and they serve the purpose of showing who are, and who are not, the true friends of God.

“Heresies - Margin, ‘Sects.’ Greek Ἰαίρεσις Haireseis see the note at Act_24:14. The words ‘heresy’ and ‘heresies’ occur only in these places, and in Gal_5:20; 2Pe_2:1. The Greek word occurs also in Act_5:17 (translated ‘sect’); Act_15:5; Act_24:5; Act_26:5; Act_28:22, in all which places it denotes, and is translated, ‘sect.’ **We now attach to the word usually the idea of a fundamental error in religion, or some ‘doctrine’ the holding of which will exclude from salvation. But there is no evidence that the word is used in this signification in the New Testament.** The only place where it can be supposed to be so used, unless this is one, is in Gal_5:20, where, however, the word ‘contentions’ or ‘divisions,’ would be quite as much in accordance with the connection. **That the word here does not denote error in doctrine, but schism, division, or ‘sects,’** as it is translated in the margin, is evident from two considerations:

“(1) **It is the proper philological meaning [dictionary definition] of the [Greek] word,** and its established and common signification in the Bible.

“(2) It is the sense which the connection here demands. **The apostle had made no reference to error of doctrine,** but is discoursing solely of ‘irregularity’ in ‘conduct;’ and **the first thing which he mentions, is, that there were schisms, divisions, strifes. The idea that the word here refers to ‘doctrines’ would by no means suit the connection, and would indeed make nonsense.**

It would then read, 'I hear that there are divisions or parties among you, and this I cannot commend you for. For it must be expected that there would be 'fundamental errors of doctrine' in the church.'

"But Paul did not reason in this manner. The sense is, 'There are divisions among you. It is to be expected: there are causes for it; and it cannot be avoided that there should be, in the present state of human nature, divisions and sects formed in the church; and this is to be expected in order that those who are true Christians should be separated from those who are not.' [Ed: No, Paul did not imply any good result of divisions. In 1 Corinthians 10 he even said they were the reason people were dying!] The foundation of this necessity is not in the Christian religion itself, for that is pure, and contemplates and requires union; but the existence of sects, and denominations, and contentious may be traced to the following causes:

"(1) The love of power and popularity. Religion may be made the means of power; and they who have the control of the consciences of people, and of their religious feelings and opinions, can control them altogether.

"(2) Showing more respect to a religious teacher than to Christ; see Notes on 1Co_1:12.

"(3) The multiplication of tests, and the enlargement of creeds and confessions of faith. The consequence is, that every new doctrine that is incorporated into a creed gives occasion for those to separate who cannot accord with it.

"(4) The passions of people - their pride, and ambition, and bigotry, and **unenlightened zeal**. Christ evidently meant that his church should be one; and that all who were his true followers should be admitted to her communion, and acknowledged everywhere as his own friends. And the time may yet come when this union shall be restored to his long distracted church, and that while there may be an honest difference of opinion maintained and allowed, still the bonds of Christian love shall secure union of "heart" in all who love the Lord Jesus, and union of "effort" in the grand enterprise

in which all can unite - that of making war upon sin, and securing the conversion of the whole world to God.” (*End of Barnes’ quote.*)

Titus 3:10 A man that is an heretick (divisive person) after the first and second admonition reject; 11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

In other words, “When someone is divisive, turning Christians against each other, try to reason with him as Jesus describes in the 3-step admonitions outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. If that fails, arrange an ‘intervention’ before the whole assembly. There, witnesses can report what the offender told them that didn’t match what he told others, and how that was calculated to turn Christians against each other. Shine that kind of light on that kind of darkness, and that will neutralize the offender’s ability to spread more darkness.”

“Heretick” did not mean, when Paul wrote to Titus, what it does today: someone with unacceptably wrong doctrines so wrong they will probably pull him into Hell - doctrines from which we need to protect others by separating heretics from other believers physically and verbally. That is, we need to “ex-communicate” heretics.

Then, it meant someone who separates Christians from other Christians physically and verbally, creating denominations which no longer interact with each other. Pretty much the opposite of how most churches define the word today.

That really is what the word *ἁρρηκτός* means - “a schismatic”, according to Greek lexicons: it is related to words meaning “divisions” and “divisive”.

But if that is what the word means according to dictionaries, what did Paul mean by it when he said to “reject” or “refuse” a divisive person? Did Paul mean we should divide ourselves from a divisive person? How

confusing is that?

“Reject”, παρατεομαι, means to “beg off; that is, to deprecate, decline, shun” according to Strong’s Enhanced lexicon. In other verses using the same Greek word, the KJV translates it “avoid, make excuse, intreat, refuse, reject”, says Strong’s. It is true that anyone reading this verse with the mindset that “heretics” should be “excommunicated” will naturally assume that “reject”, in this verse, must be a synonym of “excommunicate”. But the following context study shows that nothing like excommunication can possibly be the meaning in several other verses which use this word.

Context Study.

Expositor’s Bible: “What, then, does St. Paul mean when he directs Titus to “refuse” such a person after once or twice admonishing him? Certainly not that he is to excommunicate him; the passage has nothing to do with formal excommunication. It is possible to maintain that the direction here given may imply excommunication; but it is also possible to maintain that it need not imply anything of the kind; and therefore that such an interpretation substitutes an uncertain inference for what is certainly expressed. The word translated in the R.V. “refuse,” and in the A.V. “reject,” is the same as that which is used in 1Ti_5:2 in the text, “Younger widows refuse” (παραιτου).”

(Younger widows were refused church welfare, since they could work, and they could marry; church welfare was only for widows over 60, v. 9.) Certainly in 1 Timothy 5, the word “refuse” (same Greek word) did not mean “excommunicate”. Widows were not excommunicated for being too young! That meaning, in Titus 3, must mean we should somehow neutralize divisiveness.

In Hebrews 12:25, we are warned not to “refuse” Jesus. Meaning, to disobey, or not take seriously. No one was afraid people would excommunicate Jesus. That meaning, in Titus 3, means we *should* disobey, and not take seriously/not trust, a divisive person after the whole assembly, following the 3-

step process of Matthew 18:15-17, establishes his divisiveness.

“Refuse profane and old wives’ fables,” (1Ti_4:7) and “Foolish and ignorant questions refuse.” (2Ti_2:23) means we should not allow those topics to rob precious group discussion time. It does not mean we should excommunicate “foolish and ignorant questions”! That meaning, in Titus 3, would mean we should refuse to let gossip and slander rob precious group discussion time.

Conclusion/Lesson

Sincerely held disagreement should not frighten church people, any more than disagreements from time to time between husbands and wives should terrify spouses. The essence of wedding vows is not to pretend to agree on everything even when your spouse seems wrong, but to never give up trying to reason with each other, to cooperate to the extent common cause may be found, and to keep working very hard to make the relationship better. So it should be when Christians meet together.

What makes disagreement exasperating is when one takes positions he doesn’t really believe, and looks at contrary evidence like a dog looks at a bush. But mere sincerely held theological disagreement should be the occasion of further discussion and reasoning.

Respectful disagreement between people who disagree about important things is actually more interesting than a monologue by one person which may not be interrupted by disagreement. God put disagreements all through His Book. Talk show hosts on TV today make their shows more interesting by letting people disagree with them. The experience of reasoning together in love, respectfully, even when you disagree, turns meetings into laboratories of relationship skills which participants can use to heal all their other relationships.

Not even the most unreasonable soul is a threat to Christian fellowship, if he is at least honest. Others learn the limits of his readiness to process new information, and don’t

expect too much. As long as he does not disrupt by violating the discussion rules, he is no more a problem than a mentally disabled member. It is when a participant is dishonest, accusing people who are not present to defend themselves, while telling others different stories designed to turn people against other, that the light needs to be turned on.

The Protestant Reformation is the dark history of The Church torturing to death anyone with any sincerely held theological disagreement. “The” Church refused to reason with Protestants about Scripture. The major reason given by The Church for agreeing with The Church was that if you didn’t, you would be tortured to death. Thousands didn’t, proving the sincerity of their belief, and undermining confidence that The Church was theologically correct, if the only way it could “defend” its doctrines was by torturing to death all who disagreed.

Excommunication is a “one size fits all” response to problems, no matter the kind or degree of offense. The *Expositor’s Bible* commentary argues against a response that is so often so disproportionate:

Expositor’s Bible, continued: “Love of what is good is not only consistent with hatred of what is evil; it cannot exist without such hatred. What we have to consider, therefore, is this. Will friendliness confirm him in his error? Would he be more impressed by severity? Is intercourse with him likely to lead to our being led astray? Will it increase his influence and his opportunities of doing harm? Is severity likely to excite sympathy in other people, first for him, and then for his teaching? It is impossible to lay down a hard-and-fast rule that would cover all cases; and while we remember the stern instructions which St. Paul gives to Titus, and St. John to the ‘elect lady,’ let us not forget the way in which Jesus Christ treated publicans and sinners.”

5c Evil in ourselves merits the same attention as evil in others

Darkness is a metaphor of the evil in the world that our group is called by God to shine Light upon. Darkness in the lives of our own participants merits the same attention as Darkness outside, and the same reasoning love that is in our approach to the Darkness outside.

1 Corinthians 5:3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, (having incest with his own mother), 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Suppose one of our participants were caught kidnapping a child to be a sex slave. Should we bail him out of jail and pay his legal defense? If he contracts AIDS, shall we pray for his miraculous healing? No, Paul said, answering a similar question before the Corinthian assembly regarding a similarly dramatic scandal.

Some Bible commentators thought this means that the Apostles miraculously authorized Satan to pursue a specific regimen of torture or disease, a power, the commentators say, that was given to apostles then but is not available now. In fact, they say, such miracle working power stopped being

available as the Bible became available. (The idea that a power existed then which stopped being available as soon as the Bible was canonized raises the question why God would make sure His Book included instructions in the use of a power which stopped existing with the publication of His Book?)

Perhaps a more natural interpretation is that Paul was saying here no more than he wrote in Romans 1, that the natural consequence of extreme sexual perversion is terrible disease, so when people are determined to expose their lives to it anyway, why try to remove the consequences through prayer for miraculous healing? Sexual perversion by itself is a greater self destruction than mere physical disease and death; therefore the physical consequences, if they can rescue a pervert from worse destruction, are a blessing for perverts. Therefore the Corinthian Church was advised to stop praying for physical healing for the pervert.

Romans 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 27...receiving in themselves that recompence [consequence, salary] of their error which was meet [appropriate; that anyone would expect].

1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

Fornicator. Fornication used to be the classic ground of excommunication in American churches. To know very well that fornication is absolutely forbidden by the Bible, and yet continue proudly fornicating while demanding to be respected as a Bible believer, is a denial of such great proportions as to render one useless in any Christian gathering determined to obey God.

However, the denial, of these very proportions, that grips our entire culture in this wicked generation in which Satan has harnessed government to enforce evil, while

pastors tell their flocks not to interfere with Satan because that would be “getting involved in politics”, is so overwhelming that a considerable degree of foolish wickedness may be expected in truly sincere people who really do love God and would never do anything they thought God really hated.

Therefore it is not the mere existence of abominable sin in a member’s life that should be automatic grounds for excommunication, but the sin, plus evidence that the sinner knows better but doesn’t even want to change. It is the responsibility of the group discussion to make sure everybody knows better, and to encourage one another to rise above our human weaknesses in mercy and love. Once it is certain that a group participant understands what he is doing is a terrible sin, and yet that his wicked condition is of little concern to him, it is probably time for formal recognition that it is not his will to live as a Christian.

1 Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Since the fornicator stubbornly continues to “walk in the flesh”, the gathering of Christians, for the fornicator’s benefit, should exercise whatever influence it has to “destroy” the power of the flesh to satisfy him. This will actually work, to the extent it is important to the fornicator to have an endorsement from “religious people” sufficient to silence his own screaming conscience. The unanimous vote (or at least nearly unanimous) of the assembly that one cannot sin like that and please God, or even mix with others without contaminating them, will make it very difficult for him to argue with his conscience. The humbling admonition and public exposure that accompanies formal recognition will make it very difficult for him to even justify himself to his

closest friends, much less his own mother.

Romans 8:5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ...8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

How about a less dramatic example where we can apply this principle: if a friend spends himself hopelessly in debt, shall we pay his bills? (Proverbs 6:1 (ERV) My son, don't make yourself responsible for the debts of others....)

How about if a news reporter interviews one of our participants who turns out to also be a Ku Klux Klan member. Shall we publicly defend him as a really good guy because he is one of our participants? Or should we leave him and his cruel ideology to the cruel mercies of news reporters, while explaining that we let ANYONE interact with us, no matter how lowlife - even news reporters!

We can give the example of a human body, out of 1 Corinthians 12. Even the most disgusting parts of our bodies serve important functions. And just as our hands wash our disgusting parts, we hope that interaction between all of us will improve all of us, so that we are happiest to welcome the farthest down in our society to help improve them, which we say to explain that we are serious when we say we will welcome news reporters.

5d Withhold influence from those opposed to our group purposes

All kinds of groups, whether religious, political, or secular, select people committed to their group's purposes for their leaders, and marginalize members to the extent their lives and words oppose their purposes. For example, Democrats don't elect prolife gun owners, and Republicans don't ordinarily elect transgender abortionists. For two reasons: to keep from confusing outsiders about the organization's goals, and to keep from giving influence to people who may use it to oppose the organization's goals.

The Bible verses below affirm that common sense principle. But some clarification of them is needed, because the purpose of Christian meetings has traditionally been misunderstood, so therefore Biblical grounds for discipline have traditionally been misapplied.

The traditional understanding of the purpose of Christian meetings has been the gathering of people who will verbally endorse the short list of "doctrines" published by a Christian group, with the assumption that endorsement equates to a guarantee of Heaven; so therefore the grounds for discipline - expulsion, excommunication, etc. - have been disagreement with those doctrines, along with certain scandalous behavior.

But the verses below indicate the Biblical purpose of Christian meetings is the gathering of people who will reason with each other about how to get their Light into the Darkness outside - that is, how to help the victims of evil who surround us. This readiness to act is specifically shown by

Matthew 21 to be more important than our verbal “profession”. The Bible’s welcome to unbelievers shows the Bible’s expectation that there will be profound disagreement between participants about profoundly important things, yet 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 treats this as an opportunity; but it is when people deceive, gossip, falsely accuse, will not address evidence or logic, etc., that progress is frustrated. And those kinds of obstacles are as likely to arise from believers as from unbelievers.

Therefore, applying these principles to our purposes, it is not those who begin with wildly different worldviews who should alarm us, but those whose lives so wildly contradict their profession as to indicate they are not communicating with us honestly.

2 John 1:6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. 9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Matthew 21:28 ...A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. 29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. 30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and

said, I go, sir: and went not. 31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first....

1 Corinthians 14:24 But if all prophesy, [v. 3: if you all speak, building up, correcting, comforting] and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

In other words:

2 John 6 Love is when we don't just say we believe what Jesus said, but we do what He said. Action. Not just talk. 7 Many people say Jesus wasn't really God. Or that God didn't really suffer and die for us. They say Jesus was just a "good man", like many other "good men". (Therefore it is not more important to live as Jesus directs than to live as other "good men" direct.) This nonsense has deceived many. It is the opposite of Christianity. 8 Be careful not to waste your life following such confusion. 9 Whoever doesn't live (μενω) the way Jesus taught, is not anchored (εχω) in God. 10 When some famous religious teacher argues with that, you can be as kind and gracious to him as you would to any enemy, but don't buy his books and DVD's. Don't make him the featured speaker in your church. And don't be full of enthusiasm (χαρω) for his teaching. 11 Because if you express enthusiasm for his teaching, you are an accessory to his crimes. Not just an accessory to what he says, but also to what he does, which proceeds from what he says. [Paraphrase]

Remember that "doctrine" in the Bible does not mean what it does today; in the Bible, it means merely "teaching", not a particular statement of fact. Jesus' teachings are not presented as statements of facts to be mentally grasped and orally affirmed, but as guides for how to live. The context

here in 2 John is on how we live. We are to “walk” as Jesus taught. We are to “abide” in His teachings - that is, live by them.

Not only are Jesus’ teachings not presented as today’s “doctrines” which need only be orally affirmed to plant you firmly in the good graces of your church, but Jesus explicitly said in Matthew 21 that what you *do* is a measure of whether you do God’s will, and what you *say* is no such measure - at least when it conflicts with what you do.

Albert Barnes Bible Commentary: “Receive him not into your house - This cannot mean that no acts of kindness, in any circumstances, were to be shown to such persons; but that there was to be nothing done which could be fairly construed as encouraging or countenancing [publicly recognizing] them as ‘religious teachers.’ The true rule would seem to be, in regard to such persons, that, so far as we have contact with them as neighbors, or strangers, we are to be honest, true, kind, and just, but we are to do nothing that will countenance them as religious teachers, We are not to aid their instruction, Pro_19:27; we are not to receive them into our houses, or to entertain them as religious teachers; **we are not to commend them to others, or to give them any reason to use our names or influence in propagating error.**

“It would not be difficult to practice this rule, and yet to show to others all the kindness, and all the attention in circumstances of need, which religion demands. A person who is truly consistent is never suspected of countenancing error, even when he is distinguished for liberality, and is ready, like the good Samaritan, to pour in oil and wine in the wounds of any waylaid traveler. The command not to “receive such an one into the house,” in such circumstances as those referred to by John, would be probably understood literally, as he doubtless designed that it should be. To do that, to meet such persons with a friendly greeting, would be construed as countenancing their doctrine, and as commending them to others; and hence it was forbidden that

they should be entertained as such. **This treatment would not be demanded where no such interpretation could be put on receiving a friend or relative who held different and even erroneous views, or in showing kindness to a stranger who differed from us, but it would apply to the receiving and entertaining ‘a professed teacher of religion, as such;’ and the rule is as applicable now as it was then.”**

5e Our Attitude when we must Discipline: Zero Tolerance; Infinite Love; Respectful Communication

It is impossible for a group to take strong action together to overcome evil without having strong convictions about what is evil. Therefore, to the extent our participants disagree, disagreement will not be abstract, but personal.

For example, participants working to outlaw abortion will react to a participant getting abortion as something tragic and “wrong”. Participants seeking civil rights for transgenders will regard participants against “sodomy” as “bigoted” and “homophobic”. Participants who don’t believe in God will regard participants who quote the Bible in support of their political positions as “imposing their religion on others”. Such differences arouse such passions as to strain any communication at all, much less cooperation in action. Most people have little tolerance for being told they are wrong. But beyond the emotional hit to our self esteem, the verses here are traditionally interpreted to *require* Christians with such disagreements to separate from each other.

This study shows how the correct meaning is the opposite. We need to learn to get along with each other. We need to communicate with others as much as others will let

us. Respectfully. We need some freedom to articulate our convictions, especially when the group's goal is to develop consensus about what societal evils to work together to heal. But as in the "old saying", we need genuine respect for the "sinner", regardless of the depth of our horror of the "sin".

The lesson of the following passage is that "tolerance" of wrong is not a good thing, if "tolerance" means politely winking at wrong - not articulating why it is wrong - as if it doesn't matter much. The sense of "tolerance" that remains good is that we don't arrest, prosecute, or torture people who don't agree with us. But when the clamor for "tolerance" attacks our freedom of speech to articulate right and wrong, God calls us to zero tolerance.

But God does not call us to any kind of arrogant "truth telling" that dilutes the most respectful, gracious love. Verse 14 calls us to clearly articulate what needs to be corrected, and verse 15 says the same thing, adding that we must treat the offender as a brother.

This lesson is quite different than the traditional interpretations of this passage, which turn these verses into an excuse for division. Since the traditional interpretation colors the attitudes that Christians have about Christian meetings in general, clarifying the contrast between those interpretations, and these passages, merits taking some time. And in the spirit of this passage, doing so with "zero tolerance" for misunderstanding.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.... [Followed by examples, not of doctrines or accepted beliefs, but by the "tradition" of hard work.] 13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. 14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15

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

Verse 14 is traditionally interpreted to say “have no company” with anyone who disobeys the doctrines in this book of the Bible. This interpretation persists even though verse 15 says we should still “admonish him as a brother”.

The Greek words translated “have no company with him” actually mean there should be no “mingling”. But “mingling” of what? Mingling of relationships, as tradition assumes? Should friendships end? Should we allow no verbal mingling – that is, conversations?

That interpretation created a word not found in the Bible: “ex-communication”. Stop even talking with the offender, in order to make him feel ashamed. But how can we “admonish” someone with whom we no longer communicate? Something is wrong with this interpretation.

Normally we use the word “mingle” to describe a party, or cocktail hour, where people meet and greet and have a good time with each other, some engaging in “small talk” (light conversation about topics that few people actually care about) and some looking for valuable business, social, or political connections.

This amazing passage turns upside down traditional notions of “excommunication”. The word “excommunicate” means to no longer communicate with a person “excommunicated”, and indeed today’s practice of excommunication is ordinarily followed by no further communication. But how can a Christian group “admonish” someone with whom they no longer communicate?

But if “admonishing” continues, how can the group “have no company with” the offender? Is there a flat contradiction in the Bible between “have no company with” and “admonish him as a brother”?

Modern translations are no help resolving this apparent contradiction.

ASV: ...have no company with him...but admonish him....

BBE: ...keep away from him...but take him in hand seriously as a brother.

CEV: (don't have) anything to do with him...but speak kindly to them as you would to any other follower.

ERV: Don't associate with them. ...Counsel them as fellow believers.

GNB: have nothing to do with them...warn them as believers.

GW: don't associate with them...instruct them like brothers and sisters.

ISV: Have nothing to do with him...warn him like a brother.

JUB: do not join with him...admonish him as a brother.

TLV: do not associate with him...warn him as a brother.

TS2009: do not keep company with him...admonish him as a brother.

YLT: have no company with him...admonish ye him as a brother;

JFB: admonish him as a brother — not yet excommunicated (compare Lev_19:17). Do not shun him in contemptuous silence, but tell him why he is so avoided (Mat_18:15; 1Th_5:14).

The Greek Words.

Vincent's Word Studies: "To company (συναμικτυσθαί) Only here and 2Th_3:14. The translation *company* is inadequate, but cannot perhaps be bettered. The word is compounded of οὐν together, ἀνά up and down among, and, μίγνυμι to mingle."

Bible commentator *Albert Barnes* says:

"The Greek word here means, to mix up together; then to mingle together with; to have contact with. The idea is that they were not to mingle with him as a Christian brother, or as one of their own number. They were not to show that they regarded him as a worthy member of the church, or as having a claim to its privileges

In other words, Barnes says the “mingling” to be avoided was not physical interaction, (as has been assumed by translators, many commentators, and centuries of tradition), but of behaviors, values, principles, and morals. It must not be thought that the offender’s behavior is “tolerated” by the group. All must know it is not acceptable. If conversation ends, it is because the offender ends it, tired of hearing any more correction, because there is nothing in the conversation that leaves anyone confused about where the group stands. The group does *not* endorse the behavior it has censured.

This Bible principle, applied to our meetings, would encourage participants to be frank with each other, but other than that, any “discipline” must be measured: proportionate and appropriate to the offense. And completely free of gloating, superiority, contempt, impatience, or any other ungodly spirit, reconciliation to Godly living being the goal.

The offense in this context

These verses follow examples of people not working at all but being busybodies in the business of others. The third verse before this passage is the famous “if a man will not work, neither let him eat”. Therefore the phrase “if any man obey not our word by this epistle”, v. 14, is not a license to scour the letter for doctrines and punish all who will interpret them differently, but is merely asking respect for this advice about enabling loafers.

There is nothing in this context about formal church beliefs.

5f Our Attitude when we must Discipline: The 2nd Chance we owe those we must discipline is modeled by how Jesus treated Matthew

If a group exercises no authority to discipline a participant, participants can destroy meetings in many ways. But if a group is too quick to exercise such authority, it loses valuable talent too easily, and makes other participants nervous about whether they will be next. The passage here shows what love Jesus models for us to follow, towards even those we most decisively discipline, and what hope to hold for reconciliation. Jesus said when a participant stubbornly rebels against group rules, to treat him as a “publican”. Well, when he said that, Matthew was present. It was when Matthew was a publican, (Matthew 10:3), that Jesus welcomed him as one of His 12 apostles. And later, Matthew’s Gospel was given first place in the New Testament.

Matthew 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take

with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Notice Mathew 18:15-17 requires consensus, or close to it, to judge somebody. “If he neglect to hear the church” implies “the whole church”.

A reasonable explanation is that if it is only a 51% simple majority who is ready to censure him, while 49% support him or see no problem, that much sympathy for the problem behavior will cause the problem to fester again and again. Plus, the 49% will feel the majority thinks *they* are a problem, which makes them think about leaving the church, splitting the church over it. For both those reasons, much less than a consensus for censure should shift the discussion from the target individual to more clarity about the problem.

Excommunication as practiced today assumes that by the time any matter comes before the whole church, the only issue is whether a simple majority supports excommunication. (Several denominations don't require even that much consensus: church leaders can do it themselves.) But Jesus never authorized such a thing; nor did He authorize even a 100% majority to automatically excommunicate, once the consensus is reached; but rather, the consensus is reached, and then if the person scrutinized submits, (agrees to change his behavior, returns something taken, apologizes, or whatever the judgment of the consensus was) the problem is solved and there is no excommunication.

Thus this solution may be, and ought to be, utilized to solve a great many problems far short of the seriousness of issues associated today with excommunication. For example, is someone talking too long on just one particular topic? Will that person not respond to one or two who try to stop him? Let the one or two ask the group to rule. If there is

consensus, then let the person stop! But then if the person will not, refusal by such an individual even on what should be a small matter is disruptive to the entire group's schedule and purposes if allowed to continue.

And how should we treat such men? Shall we erect walls to separate us from them designed never to be removed again? Shall we rope off those we "don't agree with", and then, safely and permanently separated, rush off to discern the next group we "don't agree with"? Is there no hope or thought of reconciliation?

Let us ask Matthew how to treat a "heretick", whom we are to treat as a "publican". Matthew gave us this passage, and Matthew was a publican! (Matthew 9:9) As Jesus uttered the hated word "publican", in 18:17, did His eyes meet Matthew's? Was there a smile of irony from Jesus? Was their another barb of humiliating memory for Matthew, soothed by the salve of mercy? Did tears of gratitude roll down Matthew's face as he saw that this most severe punishment for Christians would be no greater than what he had received, after which he had been not merely converted, forgiven, and reconciled, but made One of the Twelve?

The acceptance of Matthew into Jesus' inner group, combined with Jesus' use of the label "publican" as the most "excommunicable" category of annoying people, underlines the point made in 2 Corinthians 2:6-11 (which was an update to 1 Corinthians 5): the purpose of excommunication is correction of a problem more deadly to the one we correct than to ourselves, (just as the correction parents give children is of problems usually more threatening to the children than to the parents), followed by reconciliation. It is not to put an eternal wall between ourselves and the ones we judge, across which we pledge never again to have fellowship.

Keeping our hearts open to those who have wronged us over and over, lied to us again and again, waiting for the next promise or the next gesture of repentance to be genuine, is very hard work. It is very disruptive to our quiet comfortable lives. It is costly.

But less so for us, than it is for God, waiting for our next promise to behave to be genuine. Matthew 6:15 warns that only to the extent we do this for others, will God do it for us. Matthew 18 gives example after example of how seriously God treats this need.

It is not so much more than the love parents have for the 18 years of raising their children. God calls us to love even our enemies, Matthew 5:44-48, with the same patience.

What does “the church” mean? The handful of people in our living room? If our tiny group manages to reach consensus that one of us is a “heathen”, will that bind another church in our city to the same view? Must one group of Christians honor the excommunication by another group?

When Jesus said “the church”, he may have meant “all the Christians in your city”. The Bible nowhere recognizes any unit smaller than that. The Church At Jerusalem was able, when it had an issue, to send “chosen men” (elected representatives) to a meeting whose conclusions could speak for all. But today our Church is so fragmented that that is not possible – yet. (Not until this book, along with other similar works, accomplishes its mission.) Before that unity can be reestablished, it is ridiculous to imagine that one tiny fragment of the Christians of Des Moines can pass judgment on someone that should govern the judgment of another fragment. Let no fragment of The Church imagine it is, or may speak for, “The Church”.

But as a practical matter, each group has to make judgments of this nature for its own protection. And remember that Jesus did not authorize physical restraints of any kind, but merely the group’s recognition of a man’s character, or of his unwillingness to follow group rules.

5g Disciplinary steps in Robert's Rules of Order

Just for comparison, here are the five kinds of discipline proposed by Robert's Rules. It may be that Bible rules would be appropriately enhanced by these rules, in some situations. There is a principle in law and in common sense that the authority to impose a harsh penalty is also the authority to impose any lesser penalty. Since most of these penalties are less than what the Bible authorizes, they may be considered likewise authorized by God as options.

Censure is an expression of strong disapproval or harsh criticism. It can be adopted without formal disciplinary procedures.

Fine (penalty) A member may be assessed a fine for not following a rule. For example, in a club, if a member is not wearing a name badge, that member may be charged a fine. Fines may be assessed only if authorized in the bylaws of the organization.[1]

Suspension A member may have a right, some rights, or all rights of membership suspended for a period of time. This action may result in a loss of "good standing" within the organization. (See also: Suspension (punishment) and Naming (parliamentary procedure).)

Removal from office A member may be removed from office. For example, the president could be temporarily removed from presiding over a meeting using a suspension of the rules. Procedures to permanently remove members from office vary; some organizations allow removal only for cause, while in others, removal may be done at the pleasure of the membership. (See also: Declare the chair vacant, Impeach (motion), and Motion of no confidence)

Expulsion A member may be expelled from the organization or assembly. An example is expulsion from the United States Congress.

Appendix 1 - FRO's

Frequently Raised Objections (to a movement so against tradition, with nothing for it but the Bible)

The objections addressed here are not responsive to the Scriptures cited above - they are not attacks on the accuracy of their interpretations or applications - but they are **Frequently Raised Objections** to the kind of meetings the Scriptures here are being quoted to justify.

I'm not called to do that

Doesn't your understanding of what God calls you to do evolve over the years?

The Bible, uniquely among the world's religions, idealizes intellectual growth; in fact, *perpetual* growth in wisdom. The Parable of the Talents links our doubling of our capacity with Life, and says when we stop growing, that leads to Death. In a profound sense, to stop growing in capacity and wisdom *is* death.

That is especially true of our understanding of Scripture, of which it is common to say those who read it again and again always find something new.

If we did that in church, everyone would leave

Whether we should appeal to others to follow these guidelines with us should be decided on the basis, at least for Bible believers, of whether that is what Scripture really says to do. If not, then nobody should do it. If so, we should not forego telling people what Scriptures says to do for fear they will leave us. We can't force Christians to obey God. But we can keep looking for Christians anxious to obey God with us.

Obviously some Bible believers will never change their traditions no matter how much Scripture they have been shown that calls them to. Just as obviously, some WILL change their traditions, and their whole lives, when they are

shown God promises to bless them for it. The Parable of the Sower tells us those we reach with Scripture who will live by it – the meaning of Jesus’ metaphor – will repay us a hundredfold for the investment we made, more than compensating us for the seed that was wasted.

A sower gives away almost all the food he has for himself, throwing it into the ground, trusting that the ground will repay him with enough food to feed many others for the whole next year. So with sowing spiritual food. Except that what the Holy Spirit repays can nourish us for all eternity.

Interesting, that shallow ground represents falling away over persecution, but in real life it is the sower himself of the Gospel who is persecuted and in danger of falling away.

I am old. I have been doing it this way all my life. America has been doing this 400 years. How can you ask all that to change just because you found a verse?

That is the same *Stare Decisis* reasoning the Supreme Court uses to argue that since we have legalized baby murder for 47 years, we shouldn’t expect judges to change just because we show them a little evidence.

Perhaps you will answer, “don’t compare infanticide with mere harmless tradition.” But what if I could show you how that particular tradition is responsible for infanticide and countless lesser abominations?

That is, what if I could show you that God’s system, had we followed it, would never have allowed these abominations to survive? And that to the extent “my people, who are called by my name” (2 Chronicles 7:14) follow it now, America will be healed?

James 2 describes as irrational heresy the theology that you can be “saved” by “faith” without “works” – without delivering those led away to slaughter in the words of Proverbs 24:10-12, without relieving the oppressed in the words of Isaiah 1:13-17. That theology numbs the consciences of many whose hearts actually burn against iniquity and would love a way to effectively help, but who are told actual

activity doesn't belong in church. Church is a place for sermons which may occasionally identify Biblical abominations, but not a place for acting together (which requires reasoning together to resolve disagreements and misunderstandings about how to act effectively) to reduce them.

Those whose consciences survive are driven from their churches to become "political activists". But outside church, our society tells them their Bibles belong back in their pews. They should not quote the Bible to explain the real reasons for their political positions. They should give the public every other rationale for their positions than the one which actually persuaded them. They shouldn't destroy their "credibility" by quoting God more than to occasionally say "God bless America".

Between churches prohibiting the *activity* in church of getting Light out into government-supported Darkness, and activists out in the Darkness leaving their Light back in their pews, the Darkness is comfortably shaded from the Light of what God says about government-supported abominations.

I can't lead a movement like that. Maybe you can. I am called to preach.

Jesus spent over half his teachings challenging, which typically meant criticizing, the clergy. Malachi 3 says that was, in fact, Jesus' purpose for coming! To "purify" them. Why?

Jeremiah 5:31 says the people love to follow theological dictators. Why? The practical fact is that people who have studied something little rightly look to those who have studied it a lot for correct understanding.

And laziness being firmly embedded in our sin nature, most of us would rather not even bother to occasionally double check the experts to whom we have delegated our stewardship.

Plus, even though there is no such thing as a 7 year seminary in the Bible, (3 years past undergraduate degree), we are accustomed to trust people with titles and degrees for

full understanding of difficult subjects. Because of this condition, people with the world's credentials have considerable influence over people's understanding of the Bible.

Seminary study is valuable. "The Scribes sit in Moses' seat" is how Jesus presented this principle. Matthew 23:2. They preserve the Scriptures, Jesus implied. Without their scholarship, the Gospel would be lost.

Almost the same with preachers and seminary scholars today. But our actions need to exceed what their traditions encourage, Jesus said in the next verse, if we may apply the verse to today.

I am not a "theological dictator". My congregation has free will.

The phrase describes an exclusive authority held by clergy in America to define their church's doctrines which they hold to be Biblically theirs. It is not just clergy who claim this authority; their congregations expect, even demand they fill that role. (Of course I am generalizing. This book is posted on a wiki. If you think of exceptions to what you read here, you can post them right next to any incomplete statements you find, in order to make future printings of this book more accurate.)

Irony permeates any honest description of the situation. Yes, church goers generally expect their clergy to define the doctrines of their church. Yet surely no Christian in America feels serious pressure to believe any particular doctrines. But the opposite, in the sense that laymen exert pressure on their clergy to fix the "errors" in their sermons. Usually not to their face, but sometimes. My uncle was a pastor. He said after the gossip builds for a few years, he would "feel called" to start fresh elsewhere.

There has been progress over the centuries. Pastors aren't burned at the stake any more. Just driven away by gossip and division. Individuals impatient for their pastor to leave will leave themselves. They will "vote with their feet".

It is how laymen “take a stand” theologically; since they are not allowed to take a stand by simply articulating, publicly, the errors that concern them – that is, they are not allowed to publicly reason with their pastor, in an open forum like that described in 1 Corinthians 14. They may only reason privately with their pastor.

If they dare state publicly their reservations, then *they* will be the ones driven out, and publicly, for being “divisive”. Not just by the pastor, but by everyone. Serious theological discussion with people who disagree – which was Paul’s “manner” according to Acts 17:2 – is rarely tolerated in today’s American churches.

The sincerity of laymen exercising these “taking a stand” options runs the full range from deep, passionate love of Scripture and alarm that it is being misrepresented, to an arrogant, critical spirit demonstrating how righteous they are by their ability to identify fault.

It isn’t just laymen leaving their church in this way; pastors leave their denominations for the same rich range of reasons. Of course there is a range of regimentation in denominations. A “congregational” form of church government (which is not tightly correlated to denominations with that word in their name) puts congregations in charge of their churches. They select their pastors, or “elders”, according to their own theological expectations. And yet even in such churches, run by church boards, there are traditional theological expectations, and generally not much interest in serious theological debate with people who sincerely hold different theological conclusions.

Conversely, even in the most regimented church, the Roman Catholic Church, which uses the term “The Church” to refer to itself, whose Popes are held to speak infallibly on doctrine under certain conditions, individual Catholics in America behave like Protestants when it comes to taking seriously their own church teaching. Certainly not all, possibly not even a majority, but many Catholics in America, like Protestants, are content with the system of “chewing the

meat and spitting out the bone”, privately and silently. Indeed, the writings sold in Catholic book stores, stamped with the Imprimatur (seal of approval) of a Catholic Bishop, make it no easy task to narrow down, from their rich variety of theologies, what is “church teaching”.

Where does the irony end? “Church” in America in the 21st Century is a theological dictatorship in which laymen and clergy alike act *and feel* like dictators. Yet quite unlike the dictatorship of a whole country, churches are dictatorships from which everyone is free to leave, and in which there are no physical punishments, jails, or fines. Yet the condition of remaining welcome in most assemblies is contentment with little freedom of speech to disagree, and less freedom of religion.

I use “theological dictatorship” as a general descriptive term of a style of communication within American churches in this century, in general, to distinguish it from the kind of robust verbal interaction that exists in many secular forums, and which, ironically, is described throughout the Bible, though most concentrated in 1 Corinthians 14.

Opposed to “dictator” in American vocabulary is “freedom of speech, of religion, and a vote for all” which is the essence of what our Founders created.

Dictatorships are relative, ranging from what are called “benevolent” to the Orwellian and oppressive.

Dictatorships are much less focused on what people say privately than what they say publicly, both because private speech is harder to monitor and because it threatens tyrants less. The counterpart of that distinction in a small group, I submit, is what people say privately to each other between meetings, compared with what they say to everyone during the whole group meeting.

What if our government restricted “disagreeable” speech and religion in exactly the way they are restricted in those secondary Christian meetings where some discussion is allowed?

Were Americans told by their government that they

could no longer communicate publicly about topics not chosen by the President, except for brief statements which would be treated as digressions, to be tolerated only as long as they are short and do not significantly distract the public from the official approved topics, wouldn't our form of government then be classified as a "dictatorship", no matter how agreeable the system had become to the majority?

In 1 Samuel 8, after all, the people were not discouraged when the dictatorship they demanded was graphically associated with the curses of dictatorship. They didn't think "King" was a pejorative term. They still demanded one. Likewise the people of Israel centuries earlier were so determined to return to slavery, so terrified of freedom, that they picked up stones to execute Moses and Joshua! Numbers 14:10!

Besides the limitation of discussion to topics only rarely chosen by the group, another indicator of a dictatorship is intolerance for views contradicting those of the leader. Most churches show little tolerance for theological differences of opinion. Many denominations have "statements of faith" which salaried employees must agree to as a condition of employment, and if anyone, pastor or janitor, has found Scriptures which call for modification of some of those tenets, the hierarchy is uninterested in reviewing those verses in order to revisit its requirements. Agree with them, or go find another church that agrees with you.

Or start your own.

Appendix 2 – The Dragon

What evils in the world tempt you to ask “how could a God of Love allow so much evil in the world?”

God answers, “What ‘mountains’ of evil would you like to see ‘baptized’? How much more evil in the world will it take to break your heart for the evil in the world as mine is broken, until you allow Me to help you push?”

You say “what can one person do against so much evil?”

God answers, “Weren’t you listening? You and I aren’t just ‘one person’! To the extent you and I are united, *no* evil can stand against *us!*”

Matthew 21:21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

“But to the extent you don’t care enough about evil terrorizing those around you to pay the cost of standing with Me – to the extent you are more afraid of it than of Me – then *you* are part of the evil which I am waiting for *others* to stand with me to heal.”

What accounts for the blind fury with which many politicians and bureaucrats tie up others with rules and laws which make no sense – which do not even benefit themselves according to all available evidence?

And when they are challenged, what motivates them to dehumanize all who dare challenge their exalted expertise as “fanatics” and “boat rockers”?

But why confine our scrutiny to politicians and

bureaucrats? Isn't it a common temptation within our human nature to relish any opportunity to manage others that we manage for its own sake, justified by benefits which we are happy to allege but too busy to document?

The word "sin" in the Bible does *not* mean "how God wants us to live which is often not how we will enjoy the greatest pleasure and happiness, which creates a conflict between what God wants and what we want".

The word "sin" in English translations of the Bible translates the Greek word ἁμαρτία, which means "to miss the mark". In other words, to fail. Since it is impossible to "miss" a goal at which we are not aiming, it means to fail to reach our *own* goals.

And yet virtually all the actions, words and thoughts which the Bible calls "sin" are things we *intend* to do, so aren't the things we *intend* our "own" goals? In conflict with God's goals?

But everyday human experience confirms that those Bible-identified "sins" which we initially intend have terrible consequences which we never intend! And that even after we begin suffering those consequences, we struggle against being drawn into repeating them, so that the conflict is between one part of us which likes part of the experience and the rest of us which dreads the rest of the experience. Usually part of what we dread is the harm we know we are causing others, which we recognize as "wrong".

This curse of "sin", combined with its magnetism, is what the Bible book of Romans describes as "slavery to sin". Fortunately Romans also describes the way to freedom from sin created by Jesus. We can indeed reduce the evil in the world, beginning with the evil in ourselves and upon that foundation launching war against all the evil around us, as partners with God.

Part of the sin which Jesus helps us overcome in ourselves and in others falls under the category "prejudice". We are tempted to dehumanize others in pursuit of the irrational goal of thinking ourselves superior by comparison.

The logic is desperate yet the temptation is rooted deep.

Dehumanizing others (seeing others as inferior to ourselves, if not less than fully human) justifies treating others with fewer rights than we expect for ourselves. We don't have to be fair to them in court. We don't have to listen to their ideas. We don't have to love them, help them, or share our blessings with them.

In short, we can do all the things to them which make others cry out, "how could a God of love allow so much evil in the world?"

Irrational fury drove slave masters of the past to take their guns, dogs, horses, provisions, and militia on long journeys to capture one escaped slave, at greater expense than the value to them of that slave, not caring if they brought the slave back dead. (Not to mention that slavery itself depressed the entire economy of the South in many ways, including the suppression of technology by killing the opportunity and incentive to innovate.) There was a simmering fury that a Black was trying to escape the Plantation. Masters often whipped their slaves to death, driven to deprive themselves of the value of the slave's labors just to set an example for other slaves: "This is MY plantation! Don't even THINK about running!"?

Today the only slave-powered plantations are in Moslem countries; they are illegal in America. But the mindset threatens human relationships in general.

Some groups of people suffer proportionately more discrimination from government, courts, police, news media, and society than others, but we are all on the plantation. Some of us are lucky enough to be slaves in the house rather than out in the hot sun picking cotton, but the Declaration of Independence is not only the founding document of the United States, it is the central theme of the Word of God. "All men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with unalienable [cannot legally be taken away] rights, and among these are...Liberty...."

The Dragon was created by American apathy. To the

extent we delegate the governing of ourselves – our social and legal interactions – to a few governing officials, and then we don't pay attention to how beneficially they are serving us, what can we expect them to do? If someone hired *you* at a wonderful salary and then never ever came back to see if you were doing your job, wouldn't you maybe get a little careless about doing it? And if someone came along and suggested that maybe you weren't doing it right, might you get a little testy?

Where do we even get the idea that all men are created equal, as the Declaration of Independence states, and should have Equal Protection of the Laws, as the 14th Amendment states? Do we get it from Hinduism's Caste System? नहीं. How about from Islam's verses about capturing slaves, and its centuries of slave trade which supplied the American South? ॥

We got the idea from the Bible. Moses came to deliver Israel out of physical slavery; Jesus came to deliver all of us out of spiritual slavery while demonstrating equal rights for women and for the least of men; Matthew 25:39-46 limits Heaven to those who treat well "the least of these My brothers" (meaning those most abandoned by most humans); and Paul wrote that "Because all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus, a person is no longer a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a male or a female." (Galatians 3:28, ISV translation; also see Colossians 3:11.)

But the Dragon whispers to Christians that God doesn't care about unimportant things like freedom, law, justice, trivial stuff like that. All that baloney about justice for the downtrodden, (illustrated by listing the fatherless, widows, and immigrants), in Deut 10:18, 14:29, 16:11, 14, 24:17, 19-21, 26:12-13, 27:19, Psalm 94:6, Jer 7:6, 22:3, Eze 22:7, Zec 7:10, Mal 3:5 – all that baloney is out of date. All that is just in the OLD Testament.

And that baloney in Hebrews 11 in the New Testament? That list of God's Bible Heroes, all of which were

either political leaders themselves or got in the Bible for confronting political leaders? You don't have to read that to get to Heaven. All you have to do is say you believe a couple of things and you're in. You don't have to *do* anything. You don't have to *obey* anything. You *certainly* don't have to do or say anything that is very *costly or risky!* That is only if you want to be a "fanatic"! Remember the Scriptures: "Thou Shalt Not Be Controversial" and "Thou Shalt Not Be Involved in Politics – certainly not on church property!" (2nd Denominations 3:16-17.)

Certainly Jesus never got involved in politics! That Sanhedrin, whose Pharisees and Saducees accused Jesus so often, out of which came the majority of Jesus' teachings, that Sanhedrin had no political power just because it decided criminal and civil cases, passed laws, and sent its police to arrest violators and execute by stoning to death – none of that was "politics"! That was just "church"!

Were it not for these Dragon Whispers, it would be a simple matter for Christian gatherings, which include people from every level of power and influence, to shine a light bright enough to make "Darkness" impossible. All we would have to do would be to shed these Noninvolvement Theologies affirming these Dragon Whispers.

But that brings us to the Dragon Within the Dragon: our own sin nature.

Why, after God brought Israel out of slavery through incredible miracles culminating with the parting of the Red Sea long enough for 5 million people and their ox carts and cattle to walk through on dry ground, "Angel's Food" magically deposited on the desert floor every morning for years, and after God promised them a Paradise – a "Promised Land", why did the people pick up stones to kill Moses and Joshua so they could return to slavery in Egypt? (Numbers 14:1-10)

Why, after Jesus died on the Cross to soften our hard hearts so we might accept a future with Him in Heaven, does most of the world to this day turn against God and all the

blessings He urges us to accept like freedom, justice, law, prosperity, equal rights, and peace, actually preferring war, tyranny, torture, the death of Christians, and the death of Jesus again if He really does come back and if He will let us kill Him again!

The Bible well articulates the cost of overcoming these evil ways of life to which all of us have become addicted. The Declaration of Independence gives this perspective: “All experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer evils, while evils are sufferable, than to right those wrongs to which they have become accustomed.”

Have we suffered enough evil? Will we finally right these wrongs?

Appendix 3 – Project

A “Multitude of Counsellors” Project

(An example of how to implement God’s meeting tips)

INVITATION: Weekly meetings with a lawmaker – in person + Zoom

Proverbs 15:22 Without counsel purposes (plans) are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established (plans succeed).

Matthew 18:19 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.

Invitation from a Lawmaker to a Potential Thinker

An invitation to you from a candidate or an elected lawmaker might say something like this: (185 word sample)

“I need your advice. Numerous laws are passed every year that affect you. You have elected me [or, may elect me] to pass good laws and oppose bad ones.

“Many experts help lawmakers understand them. But do they know what you know? Do they understand your needs as well as you? Can they speak for you as well as you?

“Many voters give me advice, requests, and opinions. I would be helpless without them. But what if some also met with each other, producing more tested, more compelling, and more advice?

“Will you consider meeting regularly with me and others

who think about how our government could be better?

“By studying, discussing, and researching together, learning from each other and from experts who join us, we can become better informed – and therefore more influential – than is possible from news articles geared to average readers. We can develop more accurate positions with broader public support than we can separately. I will vote better, and persuade better.

“And you will have the ear of someone at the capitol who is learning from the most thoughtful people in your community, including you.”

Where lawmakers/candidates can find Thinkers

If you have written to, emailed, or called a lawmaker with your opinion about an issue, the lawmaker may ask you to meet with others who care that much. A lawmaker might also invite each of the organizations sending surveys each campaign season to extend the invitation to their supporters, especially those living in the lawmaker's district. A lawmaker might also ask pastors to refer anyone interested.

Benefits to your State

- People meeting regularly (weekly?) with a lawmaker – among whom are Christians who are not censored from appealing to the highest principles they know in support of their reasoning, are actually meeting in obedience to the Scriptural goal: “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:2) (Such a group might meet with more than one lawmaker, or even without a lawmaker but with the goal of communicating with lawmakers.)

- Greater blessings than we have yet known should always be expected from greater obedience than we have yet achieved. Reason suggests the following blessings to our state would be natural consequences of such “multitudes of counsellors”:

- Both lawmakers and voters would become better informed and thus more effective for good. When participants

learn from each other, test their theories, and reason with other with the goal of separating facts from guesses, they produce sounder advice for the lawmaker with wider public support, than individuals can achieve who are not interacting with each other.

- Polarity (division, hatred) melts away to the extent people who disagree remain together in a forum which requires only that they reason honestly, follow discussion rules, and sit still long enough for an opponent to set forth his reasons. The creation of such a forum, in a society where virtually none exists that is accessible to voters, should prove a powerful safety valve where hatred can escape, and where misunderstanding can grow into wisdom.

- Establishment of “multitudes of counsellors” (see the Scripture that introduces this article) is obedience to God, a very wise decision which promises to fundamentally heal American politics - its “sickness” being the despair among those who care that so many Americans care little enough, that the leanest of winning campaigns require as much as a nice professional salary to get a few seconds of information before voters who resent the intrusion.

- A “multitude of counsellors” is the antidote to apathy and the engine of transparency. The support of informed, influential, persuasive team members makes it possible for candidates to be more honest with all voters about all of their positions without losing the next election. Without that foundation, the goal of political consultants is to find out which voters support what, so that for example a voter who wants to carry a gun and also wants to get an abortion will receive a mailing about the candidate's support for gun rights, but NOT a mailing about the candidate's opposition to abortion. This strategy requires spending thousands on surveys to identify who supports what, with more thousands on carefully targeted literature mailings which must be (1) glossy and colorful, and (2) brief, with no more information than can be consumed in about 10 seconds. The strategy is based on the experience of opponents having no interest in

learning arguments against what they think they want, while even supporters of their candidate's positions are too apathetic to read more than a few paragraphs - "bullet points". Perhaps not all candidates WANT politics to become any more intelligent, but hopefully most do, and informed teams of counsellors will make it possible.

- With better informed, engaged voters in your district, there will be less pressure to be obsessed with the mechanics of getting elected, and more opportunity to prepare for the good things that can be accomplished after getting elected.

Benefits to Lawmakers

(By understanding how this will benefit lawmakers, prospective members will understand how their contributions will be truly valuable and valued.)

- The lawmaker can explain hard decisions to the group and benefit from a team of advisors that will think about, discuss, and study them together.

- When the need to establish critical facts is explained to many people, some of them are likely to have the needed special knowledge, or know who to approach, and *how* to approach, those with the needed knowledge. Many whose expertise is needed are more inclined to meet with a group – the larger the better – than with only one or two individuals.

- When dialog with experts is needed not only to learn from them but to persuade them, because they have influence in society, they will be more likely to come speak to a group; and the group will be more likely to persuade them, if the group has done its homework and developed some consensus on the evidence they want their guest to consider.

- Political decisions must be not only about what is right, but about what the public will understand and support. Group discussions can establish both better than a single lawmaker can. Group members can further ask friends or family their view of issues, and those asked will be more inclined to trouble themselves to think about it without being offended that someone is talking to them about "politics",

when they know a lawmaker actually needs, respects, *and will try to accommodate* their view - the survey is not just a cover for asking for a donation.

- When the support of other lawmakers is needed, or their positions need to be established, a group can multiply a single lawmaker's ability to contact them and win them over. A group can also multiply a lawmaker's ability to interact with lobbyists, activists, and other community leaders.

- Laws often have unintended consequences because their details are too complicated for average voters, or even average lawmakers, to fully process. If the most perfect details are opposed by the selfish and not understood by the selfless, the wisest lawmaker is helpless to enact them. Therefore a group willing to study those details and drive “the devil” out of them, becoming better informed than is possible from news articles geared to average readers, and a group willing to *support* wise details, makes it possible for a lawmaker to understand and fight hard for those wise details without fearing not only failing to enact them but failing to win the next election for doing the right thing.

- The people who will be interested in deep detailed discussions about policy will likely be those whom a few others turn to for advice on how to vote. So the better a lawmaker can “get on the same page” (develop consensus) with a group, the better and more informed word-of-mouth endorsements of the lawmaker will naturally proceed from group members throughout the community. The influence of those endorsements is multiplied when endorsers not only agree with the “bullet points” on a candidate’s scanty literature, but understand and can persuasively defend complicated and controversial positions of the candidate. Volunteers for traditional campaign needs will also naturally arise out of any team of people in solidarity with a candidate, without making volunteering a condition for joining the discussion. (In fact, a good group will include people who disagree with the candidate so long as they reason honestly and follow discussion rules. Candidates will benefit from the

all-too-rare experience of reasoning with an opponent who will sit still long enough for the candidate to at least set forth his reasons.)

- A group of advisors meeting autonomously will not require the lawmaker's presence at every meeting, yet a lawmaker may request the group's attention to a topic even in the lawmaker's absence. The freedom of any group member to likewise propose topics will broaden the lawmaker's grasp of issues important to voters. It will also turn the group into a "think tank" able to check out new ideas – new solutions.

- **WARNING:** The wisdom gained by each participant in such a group of informed citizens gives each member more influence, and gives the group political influence independently of any member lawmaker. Of course such a group allied with a lawmaker is very powerful, but such a group will not be manipulated against its will. Its support for any lawmaker will depend on the same kinds of relationships and agreement on issues that determine whether he will win at the polls, except that a budget able to buy glossy fliers – crucial in a traditional election – will be a lesser factor, while a candidate's ability to reason with people and build in-depth consensus on details over the heads of average voters – hardly a factor in a traditional election – will be more important. So this team will not be for every candidate, but only for those who like to reason with people even when they disagree, who like to think a lot, and who are willing to serve.

Benefits to Participants

- Members become better informed than is possible from news geared to average readers. This makes people more influential, their advice more valued and respected. Their help actually makes their lawmaker more influential in the legislature than lawmakers without such teams, so that the influence of members is greater than ordinary influence with a single lawmaker.

● Members become able to do far more good than is possible from merely attending rallies, donating money and time, answering surveys, contacting lawmakers, etc. Doorknocking, making phone calls, etc is still valuable and members may continue doing that too (and may have more enthusiasm for doing that, the better they know their candidate).

● Members experience reasoning with each other about very important matters even when they disagree in a setting of patience and love – a rare opportunity – which develops relationship skills valuable at home, at work, in defending our freedoms, and defending our faith. It is a laboratory of relationship skills less intense, with less commitment than marriage, but with a similar though lesser commitment to not give up reasoning with each other just because you discover you disagree about a few things.

● Members fulfill the mandate of 1 Timothy 2:1-2 to not only “*pray*” for our leaders [so that we may lead an honest, godly life without going to jail, v. 2], but to “*petition*” our representatives to base our laws upon the principles of Heaven rather than of Hell, to “*intercede*” for those harmed by our public policies, and to “*thank*” lawmakers who serve us well (which is a wonderful way build bridges with leaders). Following the lesson of James 2:14-17, members will do these things to the extent they can, themselves, trusting God to guide and enable them, rather than expect God to do what they could have done so they can do nothing.]

● Members have an opportunity to actually correct some of the evils which tempt people to ask “how could a God of Love allow so much evil in the world?” rather than just complain. Or just listen to news about all these very important things spinning so dreadfully out of control without any way to do anything about it. It is a rare opportunity to talk with people who disagree about very important things in a setting where disagreement is not merely tolerated, but valued as essential in understanding the obstacles to good results that must be addressed. It is an

opportunity to investigate the anatomy of a disagreement, which is an essential step in building consensus. It is a way to become “of one mind” not by merely suppressing disagreement - not talking about it, but by working through the facts and evidence until there actually isn't any.

- The freedom of any member to propose topics turns the group into a resource not just for one or two participants but for every participant, in a less stressful way than a legislature processes the contributions of every member. Each member is free to alert the group to events, opportunities, or new solutions the group may want to address.

Simple Scripture-Inspired Rules

- The group must agree on its own rules. They may draw from Robert's Rules of Order for ways to keep meetings orderly. They may draw from the Bible for ways to keep meetings decent. (1 Corinthians 14:40 says meetings should be decent and orderly.)

- Participation should be open to people of all faiths and political persuasions who are willing to reason with each other respectfully, reasonably, and intelligently. We can have zero tolerance for nonsense, yet still have infinite love. Welcoming unbelievers into the conversation is even a Biblical principle, counseled in 1 Corinthians 14:24.

- Topics and any time limits should be established by vote. Topics may be proposed by any member as well as by any lawmaker(s) who are members, giving each member the freedom to share whatever God may have "revealed" to him relevant to the group's purpose, as provided in 1 Corinthians 14:30. Any lawmaker or member unable to attend a meeting may submit a proposed topic in writing. The group may vote as meetings begin on which topics they will review, and how much time to allot each topic. Records of discussions may be made for the benefit of both those present and those absent, either abbreviated typed reports, full transcripts, sound recordings, with or without video as the group may choose. If

video is chosen, and if it is chosen to post it online, individuals may elect to sit where they will not be on camera so that they will be publicly “off the record”.

- All should have freedom of speech to inspire by the highest principles they know, subject to rules evenly applied. Although participants of all faiths and political persuasions are welcome, it is foolish to suppress Bible discussion when relevant to group decisions, since even the very principles of Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion, equal rights, and a vote for all are unique to the Bible and are not found in other religions except to the extent they were influenced by the Bible. Giving everyone a turn in the conversation is counseled in 1 Corinthians 14:31.

- Topics should especially focus on actions the group will consider taking together; results, not talk that goes nowhere. "Good works." Getting "light" into the "darkness" outside. Matthew 5:16.

- Discussion should be respectful, peaceful, gentle, merciful, wise. James 3:17. Bible discussion about personal spiritual growth may be appropriate insofar as it might be helpful to correct relationship problems interfering with group action and decision making, but it should not *displace* making decisions and taking action. Although separate meetings focused on that, or on any other topic of interest, might certainly be announced to the group.