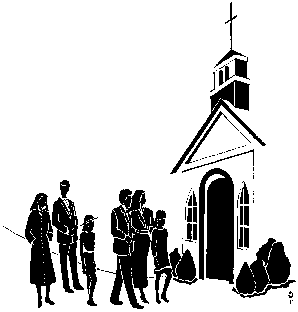
**Fellowship**

(by Buddy Johnson)

Christians have been ***“called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (**1 Corinthians 1:9**). In order to maintain fellowship with Christ and with faithful Christians we must walk in the light of God’s revealed word (**1 John 1:3-7**). We must ***“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”*** (**Ephesians 5:8-11**).

Part of the work of elders is to watch over the souls of the congregation – ***“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you”*** (**Hebrews 13:17**). When Christians refuse to submit to the Scriptural rule of the elders, then discipline must follow. Jesus gave us instructions for discipline (**Matthew 18:15-17**). The apostle Paul through inspiration by the Holy Spirit instructed the church at Corinth in a particular case 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… For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from***

***among yourselves that wicked person”*** (**1 Corinthians 5:5, 12-13**). In verse 11 he provides for us a limited list, including fornication, covetousness, and drunkenness.

The same apostle Paul commands us to withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly (**2 Thessalonians 3:6**). And he also writes to withdraw from those who ***“consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness”*** (**1 Timothy 6:3**). For example, Paul delivered unto Satan Hymenaeus and Alexander for making shipwreck of their faith (**1 Timothy 1:19-20**).

Since the wages of sin are death (**Romans 6:23**), and since the seriousness of sin is that it separates us from God (**Isaiah 59:2**) is there really any sin that should be overlooked? When someone refuses to assemble with other Christians to worship and serve God, they are guilty of willful sin – ***“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries”*** (Hebrews 10:24-27).

In doing so they have refused fellowship with the Lord first of all, then with other Christians; they have refused to partake of the Lord’s Supper; they have refused to give of their means; they have refused to join in prayers, supplication and giving of thanks; they have refused to teach and admonish in song; they have refused to grow and mature as Christians should. In other words, they have willingly refused for themselves to obey *[certain]* commands and

instructions of God’s word that make us acceptable to Him (**Romans 12:1-2**). There are other Scriptures that teach us all the above and I am sure with a little more thought we can add to the list of sins that are involved in refusing to assemble ourselves at *[the]* appointed time.

If involvement in such things does not make shipwreck of one’s faith and warrant discipline, I would like someone to teach me what does. Since we will be judged according to our works (**Revelation 20:12-13**), what will be the fate of the individual who refuses to work for the Lord?

***“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”*** (**Philippians 2:12**).

*[Edited by Kevin Heaton]*

**Alpha and Omega**

(by Gary Henry)

***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son”*** (**Revelation 21:6-7**).

God existed before all things, and He will exist after all things have reached their destiny. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. And since it is God who sent us out on our journey, it is God to whom we long to return. This longing is a part of our created nature. We may not choose to reach toward Him as we ought, but inwardly we have a persistent yearning to do so. We can no more change the fact the He is our Source than we can change the fact of our physical parentage. And what He is always asking us to do in this world is dispense with our denial and deal honestly with our heart’s desire for Him. First of all, God is the reason why we reach forward. We long for Him because He made us and put within our hearts a need for Him; we reach forward because He gave us a nature that tends in that direction. But second, God is also our motive for reaching forward. The mighty force that moves us is nothing less than this: it is for His sake that we want to be better than we are. Deep within our hearts, we want to love God as He has loved us. The third and most important point, however, is that God is the goal for which we reach. He alone is the answer to our questions, the fulfillment of our needs. And the sooner we’re able to view God Himself as our goal, the better we’ll be able to move forward with our lives.

To live in the world as it now is, is to be “away” from God. This is still His world, of course, and He is still very much present within it. But our sins have come between us and God. Like Adam and Eve, whose rebellion meant that they had to leave the Garden, all of us since then have had to live “east of Eden.” What we are is not what we were meant to be. Yet while this truth is sobering, it need not be our final truth. A way has been made possible for us to overcome what we are. Tomorrow can be better than today, and there is a heaven beyond the best of all our tomorrows. But let us not be deceived or distracted: it is God who is both our Alpha and our Omega. Heaven is worth reaching for only because He is there!