

Disorderly Brethren *Not* Among Us

by L. A. Stauffer

Admittedly, it is difficult to withdraw from brethren who are not "among us." And some would say you can't. It is frequently argued that unfaithful brethren who cease to assemble with the saints have withdrawn themselves from the church, and that no action is required of faithful brethren. This makes some sense if it is really the case.

The problem, though, is that Paul is discussing more than fellowship within God's family when he writes to the Corinthians and Thessalonians about this matter (see I Cor 5 and 2 Thess 3:6-15). He is also writing about "company" or association together in general. Forsaking the assembling of oneself with the saints does not always include withdrawing oneself from social relationships.

The reality is that brethren who no longer assemble are often present when brothers and sisters in Christ get together at the park for a picnic, meet at a local golf club to play a Saturday scramble, or join a family and guests for a backyard barbecue. This, brethren, is not merely hypothetical.

1. Disorderly: Paul tells the brethren at Thessalonica to "have no company" with brethren who walk disorderly. Disorderly, as some have noted, can be used in a military setting to mean "out of rank" or "to break rank" (Vine). It would in God's kingdom describe brethren who reject or depart from the military orders given by Christ.

2. Company: "Company" is not equivalent to "fellowship," but describes association in general, such as getting together for a meal. Paul used this word to tell the Corinthians to "put away the wicked man," meaning not to share company with him — even for a meal. The relationship Paul forbids is "social" — not spiritual or merely religious.

3. Withdraw: "Withdraw yourselves" is the responsibility of faithful brethren, not the disorderly brother. Yes, the brother who walked disorderly or in immorality was "among" them then, but when that is not the case the responsibility of the church is not changed. The problem of "company" is not necessarily, as already noted, solved by the disorderly brother's withdrawal from the assembled church.

The church must rebuke and exhort the disorderly brother, identify him before the assembly, deliver him to Satan, and resolve to have no company with him. This, when done in the assembly, as Paul commanded, alerts disciples to exclude the brother when they plan gatherings for brethren in the home or elsewhere. The disorderly brother's withdrawal from the church in no way completes what the Lord demanded toward unfaithful brethren.

— *Biblical Insights*, July 2004