



"The study of God's Word for the purpose of discovering God's will is the secret discipline which has formed the greatest characters."  
—Henry David Thoreau

30-May-03

## *Putting Out Flawed Study Practices*

As managing editor of [Forerunner](#) magazine, I occasionally receive unsolicited articles from readers who want their work published. The articles are often substandard and sometimes even doctrinally wrong, but initially, I give them the benefit of the doubt and peruse their offerings.

Recently, I received an article on disfellowshipping from a person outside the Church of the Great [God](#). God gives the church the authority to disfellowship a member who is habitually committing [sin](#) or is a danger to the congregation ([Matthew 18:17](#); [Romans 16:17-18](#); [I Corinthians 5:1-5](#), 9-13; [II Thessalonians 3:6](#), 14; [Titus 3:10-11](#)). Every private association possesses power of this sort. For instance, the Boy Scouts of America has the right as a private group to dismiss a scoutmaster if he does not meet its stated qualifications. While this authority to dismiss members is assumed by private groups in America, the church has it by direct command from the Word of God.

The fundamental reasons for using the authority to disfellowship are to protect the church and to convey to the disfellowshipped person the seriousness of his actions. It is, in a sense, spiritual quarantine. The sinning member is separated from the rest of the congregation so he will not "infect" them, and he is given time and space to deal seriously with his problem.

Disfellowshipping does not—indeed cannot—takeaway a person's [salvation](#); it does not confine him to the [Lake of Fire](#). [Jesus Christ](#) is the Judge ([John 5:22](#); [Acts 17:31](#); [II Timothy 4:8](#)), not any minister or church council. All disfellowshipping does is exclude

the rebellious member from [fellowship](#) with the church. However, if he does not [repent](#) and continues in his sinful practices, he is indeed in danger of the [second death](#) ([Revelation 20:14-15](#); see [Hebrews 6:4-8](#); [10:26-31](#)).

The author of the article I received on this subject, however, is definitely antagonistic to this practice, and he goes to great lengths to "prove" from Scripture that it should not be used. He begins by spiritualizing the perverse sexual relationship Paul condemns in I Corinthians 5, saying that the Bible is a "coded book," and when we decode this section, the apostle is really writing about getting involved in politics!

The author continues through several other points, pulling various verses out of context to support his plainly emotionally motivated assault on this [doctrine](#). Peter warns us to treat Paul's epistles carefully, ". . . in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the rest of the Scriptures" ([II Peter 3:16](#)).

The author does this with [I Corinthians 5:11](#): "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person." The apostle's meaning here is clear, but within a paragraph or two, the author of the article concludes that Paul is saying that the church has no authority to disfellowship one of its own! However, in verse 13, Paul quotes [Deuteronomy 17:17](#) to back up his decision: "Therefore 'put away from yourselves that wicked person.'" And this is a section of Paul's writing that is not "hard to understand"!

This should sound a warning to those of us who study the Bible. There are proper ways to determine what it teaches, and there are downright improper and dishonest ways. We see several of the latter in this example: First, our attitude must be that of a seeker of [truth](#), not one of trying to prove a point. Second, the context of a verse is vital to its meaning, and cutting it from that context and pasting it into another abuses the teaching. Third, spiritualizing a scripture at the expense of its plain meaning over-complicates matters and increases the possibility of error. Fourth, no one scripture will hold all the truth about a doctrine; one must gather together all the biblical material on a subject to determine God's teaching. Fifth, understanding the Greek or Hebrew meanings of words is fine, but no word's definition is enough to formulate a doctrine.

These are just a few of the principles of Bible Study we should follow in coming to understand the way of life God has called us to. We have a lifetime of study, contemplation, and [prayer](#) to learn and grow in it. We might as well do it correctly!

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Studying the Bible](#)

by John O. Reid

John Reid, reminiscing on the first love of our calling, admonishes us to rekindle our ardency for Bible study, God's personal instruction to us on the big questions of life. Because of the busy times in which we live, we may feel overwhelmed, forgetting the awesome intent and responsibility of our calling. Bible study provides a personal means of attaining the mind of God, growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. This message provides a practical alphabetical, mnemonic guide to systematically and analytically process (including asking questions, outlining and analyzing the books, chapters, paragraphs, verses, and individual words, understanding their contexts) biblical information we may have otherwise discarded. Alternate methods (themes, topics, principles, proverb indexing, and scripture cards) are also modeled.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Scratching Our Itches](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The world's ways, ideas and attitudes naturally flow into the church over time. The question is, How well do we resist and/or reject them? Richard Ritenbaugh examines three areas that have crept into the modern church and wreaked havoc.

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