Anabaptist History (Day 11) Birth of the Amish and Lessons from the Amish Division of 1693

In the early 1600s there is a lack of historical information from the Swiss Brethren that remained in Switzerland. Perhaps one of the main reason for this lack of information is due to the Thirty Year War.

Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) :

The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) was fought primarily in what is now Germany, and at various points involved most countries in Europe. It was one of the most destructive conflicts in European history. Europe was devastated by this war.



Lieutenant Heinrich Frick:

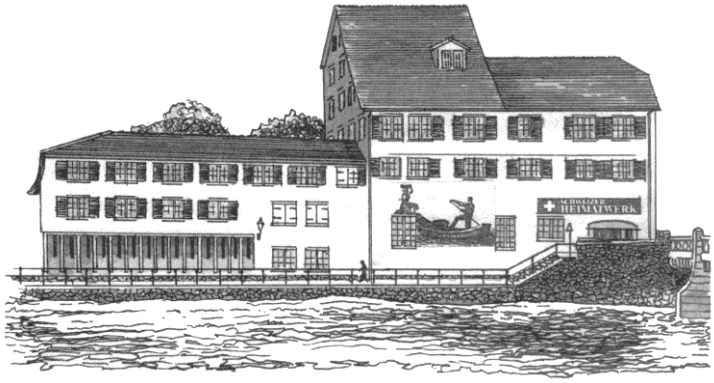
A well-to-do and notable citizen of Zürich, Switzerland, who had been converted and become a Mennonite, in 1625 refused to serve as the military standard-bearer because it was contrary to his conscience.

Frick's refusal caused a new wave of persecution at Zürich. Frick was imprisoned in1641. During his trial it was said that it was due to his **bad** example that the government was compelled to make a new strenuous effort to extinguish the movement. A record of the Anabaptist activities known as the *Taufer Kommission* (Anabaptist committee) was created. Has Frick's name was listed more than any one else- over 20 times. A quote from the *Taufer Kommission says:*

> The pastor's sister of the local Reformed church in his area reported "As an Anabaptist would be prone to do, he is occasionally seen on neighboring farms at nearby Maschwanden. He had formally led an honorable conduct, had regularly attended preaching services, had as a child learned to read and practice the art of fencing, and had been diligent in reading the Holy Scriptures. But now he is an Anabaptist, is disobedient, and has a large following. Many local people admire him and are overtaken with the Anabaptist fantasy."

When questioned why he left the reformed church Frick said, "Lack of church discipline, infant baptism, of militarism, and the oath." When asked where the meetings were held he said "First of all, only at night, usually in a forest, never during the day or on Sunday. Anabaptist only preach, they do not pressure one further. But one must repent, for preaching in itself does not make a person better."

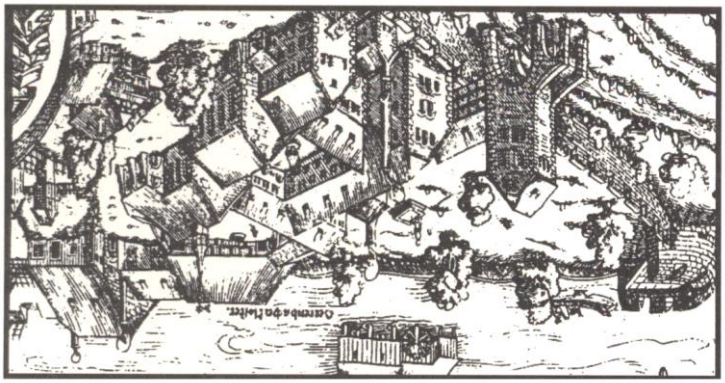
Frick was put into prison. There in prison he was so severely tortured that he recanted and agreed to attend the Reformed Church, Because of this he was released. But as soon as he got out, he felt pricked to the heart and he repented, and went back to Zürich and turned himself in to be arrested again. Frick was the owner of two very nice farms and had a considerably amount of money. After this arrest, all confiscated. After his prison sentence and the seizure of all his property he had nothing to return to. Spite these warnings he continued his Anabaptist activities and was once again put back in prison in 1641 in the Oetenbach Prison.



What Was Special About the Oetenbach Prison?

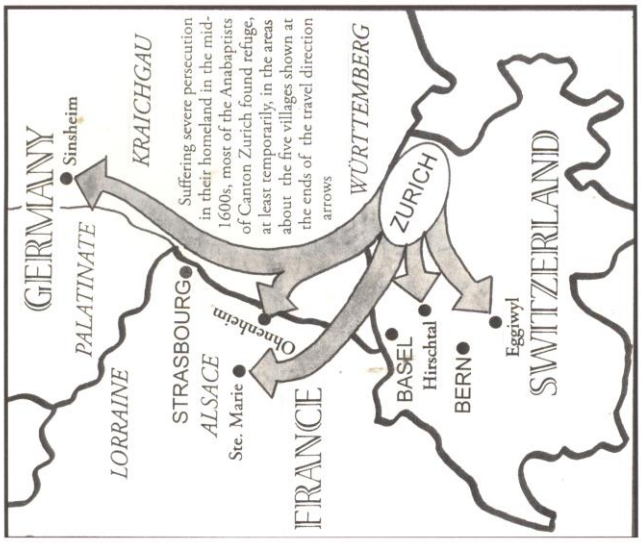
The Oetenbach prison was notorious for Anabaptist of the Zurich area. **Over 50 of the Martyr's songs written from prison and recorded in the *Ausbund* come from Oetenbach.** Years before Hans Landis was also in this prison along with numerous other Anabaptists before him.

This time in prison Frick escaped during a well-planned prison break. In this escape a boat floated up to the riverside wall of the prison. There at the wall, they received the prisoners who had chipped away a hole in the wall.



Years Later he was finally betrayed by a good friend who seized him and brought back to **Oetenbach** one last time. He was finally released in 1656. He headed for the Alsace marking an end to an Anabaptist presence in the canton of Zurich.

Historian John D Roth says that Repression and persecution, not only in Switzerland but in south-central Germany, Austria and throughout the Netherlands as well was often brutal. By the end of the 16th century, an estimated 4000 Anabaptists suffered martyrdom for their convictions.



What Was Life as an Anabaptist Refugee Like?

Weary from all the persecution the faithful continued to find other places. Fortunately after the mass devastation of the Thirty Years' War, many Lords and big land owners were ready to welcome anyone who would come in and fix up their estates. This gave new homes and opportunities to hundreds of Anabaptists families.

An interesting quote that reveals the way the Swiss Brethren immigrated during this time period is found in a church record from Jebsheim in the Alsace region of France in 1647:

> "When this sect sneaked into the village the Lordship of Rappolstein took in a number of them for three years which he installed in the [abandoned] upper castle where they were to clean up the gardens which were completely grown up with brush and trees; to restore the living quarters into satisfactory condition and to bring the grounds back into cultivation. These soon drew in others from Switzerland so that in a short time there was a great swarm of Anabaptists which relocated here and there, but assembled in great numbers at the castle for their worship services. When this was forbidden them, they began holding their meetings outside of the village in hedges, gardens and fields. May God impress the officials to uproot this weed and restore them to the pure church." (Unser Leit Vol 1, 18)

Among the first openings found for refuge outside of the country of Switzerland itself was the narrow mountain enclave valley in the Alsace called *Sainte Marie-aux-Mines*. With the 30-year war and the collapse of their silver industry made them ready for some help from the refugees.

How Did Growth Effect the Church?

The Swiss Brethren in Alsace organize.

As this little community of refugee Anabaptist came into France they started to organize. On April 21, 1660 they held a meeting in which they officially accepted the Dordrecht Confession of Faith. The confession was originally created in 1632 but recently it was printed in German. This gave the new little group a sense of order and stability and even a heritage. Heinrich Frick was one of the ministers that signed the agreement. Another important leader who came from Frick's hometown was starting to preach in the high lands around Berne by the name Ulrich Müller

Did All of the Swiss Brethren Receive the Dordrecht Confession of Faith?

The Swiss Brethren who went to the Emmental area did not think as highly of the Dordrecht confession.

How Did the Church Respond to the End of Persecution?

In some areas the Anabaptist found enough peace and opportunities to actually engage in big businesses. For example by 1692 the bishop at *Sainte Marie-aux-Mines* had enough wealth to be placed on the tax rolls in the Bourgeois (Well-to-do) class. Some made promises never to return the Switzerland but returned anyway. Once they started purchasing property again and establishing businesses it became hard when the authorities threatened to take everything away. Due to the pressure some
even succumbed to having their non-Anabaptist relatives or neighbors baptize their children so that they could avoid persecution and keep their properties. Attending Reformed services started to grow more common.

Hans Reist:

By 1685 an Anabaptist who had recanted was a deacon in the Reformed Church.

The Mennonite Encyclopedia says that Hans Reist's leaving Bern was probably not voluntary, however, for about that time about 700 persons were expelled from the canton of Bern. This was called the "Great Purge" of 1670.

But Reist, like many other Emmental Anabaptists, returned from his exile. In 1686 the court record reads, "Hans Reist of Sumiswald, brother-in-law of Tobias Heininger, has been summoned to court, because he called for Heininger's wife at Waltrigen to take her to an Anabaptist meeting.

Curiously, there is another court record dated February 6, 1701 says, "Hans Reischt" promised the magistrate, who had summoned him to answer for his Anabaptism to attend church services and accept the sacraments.

The Bernese Mennonites had a severe struggle to undergo in the storms of persecution of the 17th century; but a still worse struggle was brought upon the leaders by internal dissension. This was especially the case with Hans Reist. Hans Reist was the main minister on the "Mennonite" side of the Amish-Mennonite split.

Ulrich Müller (Founder of the Amish?):

About this time a minister form the Highlands around Berne by the name of Ulrich Müller became a powerful evangelist and missionary in Switzerland and the Alsace region. Many court records reveal that Muller was very active. In 1674 he was arrested and placed in the Thun castle. He was released a year later. Apparently he went right back to preaching. In only two months after he was freed from prison, there are court records describing places that he had come to minister and to preach.

Looking at records from this area historian Leroy Beachy concludes that a new beginning was happening with these young believers in Alsace and especially the highlands (Oberland) parts surrounding Berne.

Like the faithful brethren over a century before them revival started and a people started to form powerful communities that were alive with purpose and mission.
The minister on charge of the Reformed church in Langnau said in 1692:

> "The Anabaptist sect has grown enormously over the span of twenty-four years due to the leniency of certain Landvogte so that in the year 1692 there were twenty eight known Anabaptists in this parish. Everyone of them was so certain of his or her faith that no one wanted to listen when we preached something against them."

In 1687 there is new printings for Froschauer Bibles and the printing of new books including the Ausbund, and Anabaptists Martyrdom stories. The Berne government again renewed their

suppression of the Anabaptist. However, the common people started to often take the side of the Anabaptist even if they did not join them or even become a Christian.

In 1693 a government order was issued to the executive council of the reformed clergy “to determine the reason for this leaven and how to counteract the strong increase of Anabaptism.” They provided their response in written form. The response showed honesty and humility on the part of the men who conducted the study.

In a 1692 report of a pastor from this area who questioned a woman if she were an Anabaptists she replied, “No, to tell the truth I am not worthy to be an Anabaptist: they probably would not accept me because they are such a holy people” She went on to say that her brother had been a godless person, but after he joined the Swiss Brethren “he became converted and enlightened, just exactly like the Apostle Paul.”

It is this group of revised first generation Anabaptist that soon comes into conflict with older Anabaptist churches.

Leroy Beachy says that the success of Ulrich Muller’s ministry from 1673- 1685 can hardly be overestimated. 200 new surnames came into the Anabaptist s during this time!

In his replace Muller ordained Jacob Amman, Isaac Kaufman, Nicholas Augsburger, and Yost Yoder. All these were also excellent missionaries but not equal to the response of Muller.



An interesting artifact was found in a Reformed church in Steffisburg. A large wall plaque was discovered in an old barn that revealed the names of patrons that donated money for the building of the Reformed church. Of the 26 names listed only two are not known Amish names.

Was the Amish –Mennonite Division a Church Split?

Considering the fact that the Oberlander (Amish) were a new group of revised Anabaptists Leroy Beachy suggest that he does not consider it a split. One of the points that Leroy use to support his claim is that surnames of Anabaptist still to today.



Leroy reasons that if you consider the names of Mennonites and Amish then as well as today it is easy to see a clear line between Amish names and Mennonite names. His point is that if it was indeed a split then the name would have been more the same on both sides. But since the names are so clearly different Leroy suggest that the groups were never actually together.



Jacob Ammann:

One of the elders ordained by Ulrich Müller.

The Mennonite encyclopedia says, "Jakob Ammann, was a native of Erlenbach in the Simme Valley south of Thun, canton of Bern, Switzerland. He founded the Amish branch of the Mennonites through a schism which he occasioned in 1693 in the Emmental, canton of Bern. "

From John D Roth's primary source book:

In the summer of 1693 Mennonite congregations in the settlement in Alsace commissioned Jacob Ammann and several other ministers to make an journey to investigate the churches in Emmental in an attempt to clarify the position of the Swiss Brethren ministers there on several questions regarding church discipline. There were repeated reports of the Emmentaler Mennonites attending state church services and different accounts of their lack of church discipline.

One particular account circulated where a woman had told some lies, and when she was asked about it she denied it and said that she did not say those things. Finally she was exposed by the ministry for lying and she herself then confessed that she had been lying all along. Hans Reist ruled that "this woman should remain as a sister in the congregation. "

The issues at stake were varied some smaller concerns came up including clothing, beard, hair styles, ownership of a meeting house, funeral attendances at state churches. But the main concerns were:

(1)The Frequency of communion,
(2) Foot washing,
(3) Procedure in church discipline
(4) The status of the "Truehearted"
(5) Which offenses warrant church discipline?
(6) Shunning

The Mennonite Encyclopedia says that

> "From the original documents which have been preserved, it is clear that Jakob Ammann's attempt to force the elders in the Emmental (canton of Bern) to accept the Meidung, i.e., the shunning or avoidance of excommunicated persons, was the chief if not full cause of the division, although several minor issues were mentioned."

However, when I study all the sources I see some blame on both sides:

The Build-Up:

The specific order of events of the division, which occurred in late July or early August 1693, is as follows. Elder Jakob Ammann of Erlenbach had started to hold the communion services twice a year instead of only once, as had been the practice in Switzerland.

Two elders, Hans Reist and Benedict Schneider, opposed this innovation although it was decided to permit it. Ammann and Reist thus became the leaders of opposing factions on this issue. When asked directly how he felt about communion twice a year Hans Reist replied: "If a person was worthy and could prepare himself properly and well, then one time would not be too much; and if a person could prepare himself properly and well, then one time would not be too few."

Shortly, however, the main issue of the controversy between the two men shifted rapidly to the Meidung—(shunning.) Ammann asked two preachers (Niklaus Moser and Peter Giger), who were called by Reist to help settle the communion controversy in his own congregation, to ask Reist what he believed concerning the Meidung.

Learning that Reist opposed it, Jacob Ammann became very concerned. They had all received the Dordrecht confession of faith and the confession spoke very clearly about shunning. To Jacob by not "confessing" to this article, which they had all previously agreed on, the Reist group had apostatized from the faith.

Ammann took three ministers (Ulli Ammann, Christian Blank, and Nicklaus Augsburger) with him on a tour of the churches to find out what the ministers in Switzerland believed about Shunning. Discovering that only a few of them agreed with him, Ammann decided to call a meeting of all the Swiss ministers in Nikolaus Moser's barn near Friedersmatt. However even though letters were sent out before hand, not all of the ministers came.

Most offensively, **among the absentees was Hans Reist**. Since the meeting was inconclusive, a second meeting was called for two weeks later. Jacob probably was feeling short on time because while he was there warrants for his arrest were going up around the area. The "Amish" were risking capture for even being in the area.

This Second meeting was fairly large, but again Hans Reist did not appear, he even circulated a letter saying not to bother with the "younger ministers." The reason for not coming was that he had to rake his hay. (ouch!)

This upset Jacob Ammann. Ammann had twice requested him through intermediaries to ask Reist what his position on shunning. . Each time Hans Reist did not reply. Indicate his stand on shunning. On one occasion, Reist gave an evasive answer: saying **"What goes into the mouth does not defile the person but what comes out of the mouth, that defiles a man."**



At this point, the controversy hastened to a climax. Ammann put before the meeting a letter listing six charges against Hans Reist, and when he had read the charges he declared that Hans Reist is to be excommunicated.

After further controversial discussion Ammann then excommunicated Nikolaus Moser and Peter Giger and several other ministers after these men had refused to confess to the article Dordrecht article on shunning. (XVII) After these last excommunications, Peter Zimmermann said, **"There you have it,"** and the meeting broke up, the Ammann party leaving the building without shaking hands. While Jacob Ammann was leaving Peter Geiger grabbed Amman's coat sleeve but Amman jerked it away and walked out.

The First Swiss Church Split?

A little later seven of the "Amish" held a meeting nearby which can be viewed as the first Amish party gathering. Either shortly before his tour through Switzerland or shortly thereafter, Ammann expelled a number of the members of the church at Markirch in Alsace because they did not admit that attending services in the state church was wrong.

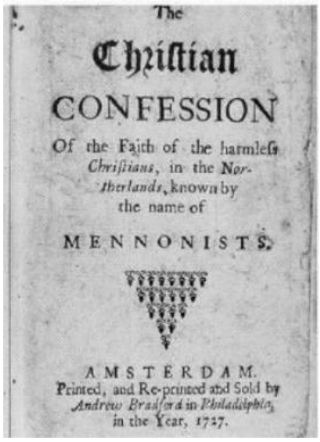
John D Roth in his book Letters of The Amish Division cites 6 main differenced between the New Amish group and the older Mennonites.

Frequency of Communion:

It seems the first issue that brought them into conflict was the discussion of having communion twice a year. The personality of Hans Reist came out here. When asked how he felt about it he did not answer directly. He comes off witty and almost a bit slippery at times. He said "If a person was worthy and could prepare himself properly and well, then two times would not be too

much; but if a person could prepare himself properly and well, then one time would not be too few.

In the letter written by Peter Giger we see that before the question of Meidung had caused much trouble, Hans Reist had a controversy in his congregation because Ammann had started holding the communion service twice a year. There is, however, no indication that this question had any large part in the controversy.


The
Christian
CONFESSION
Of the Faith of the harmless Christians, in the Netherlands, known by the name of
MENNONISTS.
AMSTERDAM.
Printed, and Re-printed and Sold by Andrew Bradford in Philadelphia, in the Year, 1727.

Footwashing:

The Swiss Brethren and the Hutterites had never started the practice of footwashing. However the new Amish group found it in the Dordrecht confession considered it scriptural and practiced it. It is interesting to note that the letter written by Christian Blank was written for the express purpose of proving that neither Meidung nor footwashing was the cause of the division. But this in itself is evidence that footwashing as well as Meidung was practiced by the Amish and not by the other group at the time the letter was written.

The Dordrecht confession article XI. On the Washing of the Saints' Feet:

> We also confess a washing of the saints' feet, as the Lord Christ not only instituted, enjoined and commanded it, but Himself, although He was their Lord and Master, washed His apostles' feet, thereby giving an example that they should likewise wash one another's feet, and do as He had done unto them; which they accordingly, from this time on, taught believers to observe, as a sign of true humility, and, especially, to remember by this feet washing, the true washing, whereby we are washed through His precious blood, and made pure after the soul. John 13:4-17; 1 Timothy 5:10.

C. H. Smith says, "The Swiss church had never adopted the practice. But Ammann now also introduced the first form of its observance among his followers." Even though we have no evidence that footwashing had any part in starting the controversy, we know that it had a part before the trouble was over, for Uli Ammann accuses the other side of making it an issue when the Amish sought a reconciliation, and again in a letter written Jan. 21, 1711, we find that the Amish in another attempt at reconciliation wished to continue the practice.

Salvation of the Truehearted:

How do you consider other Christians? What if they reject the teachings of Christ? This was a question in their day perhaps even more than it is in ours.

One of the other things for which Ammann contended was uniformity in dress, which included the style of hats, garments for the body, shoes and stockings. He also taught against the trimming of the beard and attending services in the state church. In fact he excommunicated a number of persons in the congregation at Markirch because they would not confess with him that it was wrong to attend services at the state church.

Offenses Calling for Church Discipline:

For what sins would the church believe that it needs to give church discipline and shunning?

The Dordrecht confession article **XVI on the Ecclesiastical Ban, or Separation from the Church:**

- We also believe in, and confess, a ban, Separation, and Christian correction in the church, for amendment, and not for destruction, in order to distinguish that which is pure from the impure: namely, when any one, after he is enlightened, has accepted the knowledge of the truth, and been incorporated into the communion of the saints, sins again unto death, either through willfulness, or through presumption against God, or through some other cause, and falls into the unfruitful works of darkness, thereby becoming separated from God, and forfeiting the kingdom of God, that such a one, after the deed is manifest and sufficiently known to the church, **may not remain in the congregation of the righteous, but, as an offensive member and open sinner, shall and must be separated, put away, reproved before all, and purged out as leaven; and this for his amendment, as an example, that others may fear, and to keep the church pure, by cleansing her from such spots, lest, in default of this, the name of the Lord be blasphemed, the church dishonored, and offense given to them that are without; and finally, that the sinner may not be condemned with the world, but become convinced in his mind,**

and be moved to sorrow, repentance, and reformation. Jeremiah 59:2; 1 Corinthians 5:5, 13; 1 Timothy 5:20; 1 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 10:8; 1 Corinthians 13:10.

- Further, concerning brotherly reproof or admonition, as also the instruction of the erring it is necessary to exercise all diligence and care, to watch over them and to admonish them with all meekness, that they may be bettered, and to reprove, according as is proper, the stubborn who remain obdurate; in short, the church must put away from her the wicked (either in doctrine or life), and no other. James 5:19; Titus 3:10; 1 Corinthians 5:13.

Shunning:

By far the most significant issue at stake in the controversy was over this issue.

The Dordrecht confession article XI on **Shunning the Separated:**

- Concerning the withdrawing from, or shunning the separated, we believe and confess, that if any one, either through his wicked life or perverted doctrine, **has so far fallen that he is separated from God, and, consequently, also separated and punished by the church,** the same must, according to the doctrine of Christ and His apostles, be shunned, without distinction, by all the fellow members of the church, **especially those to whom it is known, in eating, drinking, and other similar intercourse, and no company be had with him that they may not become contaminated by intercourse with him, nor made partakers of his sins**; but that the sinner may be made ashamed, pricked in his heart, and convicted in his conscience, unto his reformation. 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

- Yet, in shunning as well as in reproving, such **moderation and Christian discretion must be used, that it may conduce, not to the destruction, but to the reformation of the sinner.** For, if he is needy, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or in any other distress, we are in duty bound, necessity requiring it, according to love and the doctrine of Christ and His apostles, to render him aid and assistance; otherwise, shunning would in this case tend more to destruction than to reformation.

- Therefore, we must not count them as enemies, **but admonish them as brethren**, that thereby they may be brought to a knowledge of and to repentance and sorrow for their sins, so that they may become reconciled to God, and consequently be received again into the church, and that love may continue with them, according as is proper. 2 Thessalonians 3:15.

Poor Apologies….

Ulli Amman admits mistakes made on both sides ("Letters of Division…pg 85)

Various attempts at reconciliation were undertaken between 1694 and 1698, both by correspondence and in meetings, but all failed. The Amish finally decided they had been too rash with their use of the ban, in having acted **without the consent of their congregations** and accordingly placed themselves under the ban (probably in 1698).
(see pg 88 and 121of the Letters of Amish Division)

When after a time the Amish indicated that they would like to be received into the church again, the other side stated they would receive them, but when the Amish insisted again that the other side agree with them on the Meidung and the other issues, negotiations broke down. That's not an apology.

Later, after the Amish had been received into the church fellowship by ministers who had not participated in the original division, and their several attempts at reconciliation had begun to bear some fruit, the matter of the literal observance of feetwashing as the Amish practiced it became a bone of contention and proved to be a barrier on the road to peace, since the Swiss Mennonites had never practiced this ordinance before.

On 7 February 1700, some Amish leaders again decided to put themselves under the ban, but this move failed to produce the desired peace. (pg 109) No other attempts at reconciliation are recorded until 1711. On 21 January of that year a group of Amish from the Palatinate came to Heidelsheim in Alsace desiring to make peace with the brotherhood there **provided they would be allowed to practice the Meidung and footwashing.** The Heidelsheim congregation then wrote to Switzerland for advice, and finally decided, **in spite of a negative answer, to receive Uli Ammann and Hans Gerber, two of the petitioners, into fellowship again. This had no effect on the larger division which continued unresolved.**

The most heated question centered around the issue of shunning. Do we shun open sinners? How do we apply shunning? What scriptures do we use to discuss church discipline?

Lessons to Learn:

- Read 1 Cor 5 and Matthew 18. Are their any other passages that can be used to discuss church discipline?
- How would you apply Gal 5:21 and Eph 5.5 I Tim 1:9?
- Does 2 Thess 3:14 indicate different levels of church discipline?