

# 'Order' (Ordnung) That Is Out of Order (Disguised Rebellion)

by Merle Weaver

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of submitting to Christ and repenting of disguised rebellion by excluding others from communion and fellowship based on human standards.*

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 5:6, Colossians 2:20, Hebrews 10:24, Hebrews 13:13, 1 Peter 5:3

**Topics:** "Legalism", "New Covenant"

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## Description

Merle Weaver addresses the issue of churches creating rules not found in the Bible, leading to unjust excommunications and divisions among believers. He emphasizes the importance of not building fences on God's property but instead walking in the ways of the New Covenant, provoking one another to love and good works. Weaver warns against legalism and the danger of excluding fellow believers based on man-made standards, urging repentance and alignment with God's Word.

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## Transcript

Recently in the county where I live yet another person was excommunicated from his local assembly for "breaking the church rules". Among other things this deacon's primary offense was "not shunning", in this case accepting car rides from, his children who were fellow believers but who had left their church. Understandably, many believers both inside and outside of the church in question were upset at this injustice. To aggravate matters and add "insult to injury", the bishop announced that anyone who did not profess agreement with the above decision would also be excommunicated. (This church had a tradition of asking each member for their agreement). Three couples, six church members, were not able to affirm their agreement that Sunday morning and thus found themselves excommunicated from the fellowship. In the discussions and condemnations following such actions, I found myself thinking; "True, it was wrong what the bishop, the one charged with overseeing yet not

over-lording God's heritage (1 Peter 5:3), had done, and it would be right to ask God to hold him accountable. Yet as I reflected, he was only representing a much bigger problem not limited to a certain denomination or group, but which has afflicted many of God's people, especially in the geographical region where I live".

As I reflected on this problem, of individual churches or groups making rules about things not specifically directed in the Bible, or as in the case above even contrary to God's Word, the subject of "fences" came up. As I was thinking about this analogy or comparison, a number of thoughts came to my mind. First of all, fences should only be built on one's own property not on other's property against their will. Who's property is the church, Christ's or man's? We decry and disagree with the Roman Catholic concept of God delegating his authority to earth, such as the pope, to do what he will and expect "heaven to back him up". Rather, we believe we are to bring heaven's will and reign to earth as taught in the Lord's prayer. (Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...)

Consequently, we must not build fences on God's property, only oversee the fences He has built. In fact in Colossians 2:20-22 we are specifically forbidden from such "fence building" activity. Let us repent of trying to police and control our brother by means of rules and laws and let us walk in the ways of the New Covenant "provoking one another unto love and good works" - Hebrews 10:24. In the fear of God, leaders and followers alike, quickly come out of agreement or participation in any such activity. If you have agreed to such "lording over" go back and repent and make it right with any such brother and with any group you gave any such agreement to. "Do not set thy brother at naught!" "Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? Ecc. 5:6 - Such agreements, until withdrawn, stand. If the agreement was made publicly, it must be withdrawn publicly, not just "swept under the rug". Surely the Lord is displeased when His children relate thus with each other. Such activity, though it may seem right to human minds, has no basis in scripture.

Now some will quickly look at the "opposite ditch" of lawlessness and licentiousness and wrongly conclude there is no other way to avoid that ditch. In this they are not understanding the nature of the "New Covenant". True, we live in a land of much disorder, deterioration of the family,

morals, etc. and we surely want to preserve the godly and scriptural values and practices we have. This desire is good. However, it is best done according to the way of the New Covenant namely walking with God by His Spirit and in close fellowship one with another. Now, if a brother is caught in unrepentant sin, as described in the scriptures, then we acknowledge which side of heaven's "fence" such a brother is on. We are not building the fence only acknowledging heaven's judgment and bringing it to the earth.

The early Anabaptists did not walk as many of us do today. The following quote from their writings should help us to understand this more clearly.

"I am truly sorry that you have been disturbed by people who exalt themselves and make rules about things not clearly laid down in the Gospel. If the apostles had told us exactly how and with what the believer is to clothe himself, then we would have a case to work on. But we dare not contradict the Gospel by forcing men's consciences about certain styles of hats, clothes, shoes, stockings or haircuts. Things are done differently in every country. We dare not excommunicate people just because they do not line up to our customs. We dare not put them out of the church as sinful leaven, when neither Jesus nor the apostles bound us in matters of outward form. Neither Jesus nor the apostles made rules or laws about such things. Rather, Paul said in Col. 2 that we do not inherit the kingdom of heaven through food and drink. Neither do we inherit it through the form and cut of our clothes.

Jesus did not bind us in outward things. Why does our friend Jakob Amman undertake to make rules, then exclude those from the church who do not keep them? If he considers himself a servant of the Gospel but wants to live by the letter of outward law, then he should not have two coats. He should not carry money in his pocket nor shoes on his feet. If he does not live according to the letter of Jesus' law, how can he force the brothers to live by the letter of his own laws? Oh that he would follow Paul who feared God, who treated people gently and who took pains not to offend the conscience of the weak. . . . Paul did not write one word about outward forms of clothing. But he taught us to be conformed to those of low estate and imitate only that which is honorable. We are to do that within the manner of the land in which we live. We are to shun styles and proud worldliness (1 John 2). We should not be quick to change our manner of dress. Fashion deserves rebuke. New articles of dress should not

be accepted until they become common practice in the land, and then only if they are becoming to Christian humility.

I do not walk in the lust of the eyes and worldliness. All my life I have stuck to one style of dress. But suppose I should have dressed myself according to another custom, the way they do it in another land? Should I then be excommunicated? That would be illogical and against the Scriptures. The Scriptures must be our guide. We dare not run ahead of them. We must follow them, not lightheartedly, but in carefulness and fear. It is dangerous to step into the place of God's judgment and bind on earth what is not bound in heaven." - Gerrit Roosen, author of the confession of faith of the Anabaptists in northern Germany, and of the Christliches Gemüthsgespräch, a leader among European Anabaptists in the seventeenth century. December 21, 1697

Let us seek to never exclude from our communion and fellowship those who Christ has accepted and vice versa, especially if such exclusion is based on our human standards and not spelled out in God's Word. Even though we may be imperfect and at times miss the mark, let us seek to as accurately as possible reflect heaven's perspective and Christ's will and wish. There are many who freely admit their rules and standards exclude other Christians from their communion and fellowship, but astonishingly, they unashamedly persist in such rebellion, merely for the sake of convenience. They may say, "It is not wrong for us to agree on some things is it?" No, it may even be good to agree and be of one mind, but to exclude other believers from functioning in the local body based on our agreement, proves we think it is "our church" as opposed to His church. The question for you and I today is, "Will you, will I, submit to Christ and repent of this great rebellion and wrong, even if it costs us to suffer with him outside the camp?" Hebrews 13:13-14 If we wrongly, exclude from, communion and/or fellowship those who Christ calls brethren will we hear His words depart? Matthew 25:45-46.

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