

Separation

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1)

Our text issues a call, nay, a command to separation. It is based upon the fact that there are things and people that are incompatible one with another. Righteousness cannot fellowship with unrighteousness; light cannot dwell with darkness; believers have no share with unbelievers; and the temple of God has no agreement with idolatry.

This has been so from the beginning of Creation. God separated time from eternity, matter from nothing, and the heavens from the earth. He went on to divide the light from the darkness, day from night, and the seas from the dry land. After that, God separated the beasts from humans and put a difference between male and female. He also told man that there is a difference between good and evil, warning him of the judgment for committing sin.

When man sinned, there came death, which is a separation between God and man. Scripture tells us, *“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:”* (1 John 1:5–6) There is also the ultimate separation from God in outer darkness.

Cain killed his brother and was separated from his family and from most of humanity. Noah had to separate from the rest of the world in order to board the ark and be safe. Abraham had to separate from worldly Lot. Lot had to separate from wicked Sodom. Israel had to leave Egypt, and also had to live separately from other nations.

The covenant of circumcision had Israelite males separating themselves from a portion of their flesh, signifying both their faith in God and their separation from sin (See Colossians 2:11). The circumcised were also to be separated from the uncircumcised.

The Levitical law and holiness code called for a separation from those who were immoral. Often the separation was due to the execution of the death penalty upon those whose sins were harmful to family and society. We also see that the leper had to live separately from those who were healthy.

We also find a separation placed between those Jews who were atoned for and worshiped the LORD and those who were not atoned for and did not worship the LORD.

Numerous times in the Scriptures we find that God commanded Israel to put a difference between the holy and the profane; and He also rebuked and chastened them when they did not do so.

Separated Minds

It is especially interesting to notice that Israel was to be separated from the unbelieving nations around them even in the things that they ate (See Leviticus 11). Why was this so? God wanted the people to be distinct from the nations around them, even in the normal habits of life. Paul told Timothy that, while the dietary laws have been abolished, the principle of separation still stands and is seen in our willingness to nourish ourselves with the good Word of God while refusing profane words and myths (1 Timothy 4:1-7). Just as we are taught to not be led by the counsel of the ungodly (Psalm 1), we should always recognize the need to be separated from the influence of the world upon our thought lives.

Too often we have thought of separation as merely a separation from doing sin, but we must recognize that God wants us to have purity of thought also. Our transformation comes from the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2), and that began when we were born again (Colossians 3:10). We are taught to surrender our minds to the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:3-5), and to become fools in worldly wisdom that we might gain godly wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:18). Lot, sadly, failed to do this and troubled his mind greatly

with the things that he saw and heard in Sodom (2 Peter 2:7). Lot's failure in this respect let him to compromise and a testimony that was so weakened that he could not help many in his own family.

Israel's dietary laws separated them in their nutrition and eating habits so that they were not like the nations around them; and that pointed to our need to nourish ourselves only with that which is good. Many things that we eat today are enjoyable yet unhealthy. Whether they are filled with sugar, feed inflammation, too fattening, or simply devoid of nutritional benefit, much of today's food is harmful to us. Just as we must beware of our nutritional intake so that we can be healthy, so we must be very careful of the things we see and hear, because they will greatly impact our minds and holiness. Our music, our reading, our conversations, and our television viewing all have effects on our minds; and they will feed either holiness or worldliness in us. We must be a separated people, feeding ourselves only on that which is good.

Separating From Doctrinal Error

Doctrinal error is a very pervasive thing, steadily working like leaven and spreading its corrupting influence throughout the body of Christ (Galatians 5:9). Paul told Timothy it is like gangrene, spreading, decaying, and destroying (2 Timothy 2:15-17). It is for this cause that we must separate ourselves from grave doctrinal errors.

Paul warned the Romans to take notice of those whose teaching contradicted the doctrines of the gospel and holiness (Romans 16:17-18) and to turn aside from them, because those people would be servants of their flesh rather than followers of Jesus. Peter warned that there would be false teachers whose teachings would tempt and mislead others to walk away from Christ (2 Peter 2:1-22). It is partly considering this that Peter teaches us to be holy (2 Peter 3:11,14).

John also battled false doctrine, and those who were teaching falsehoods about Jesus. Mainly they said that Jesus had not come in the flesh, and their teaching then affected the morals of the people they influenced. John said, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 10-11) John is teaching that we should not give material, spiritual, or moral support to the purveyors of false doctrine, because one becomes a partner in their error by so doing. Separation is essential for the health, prosperity, and survival of the churches.

The failure to separate from those teaching and embracing false doctrine has wreaked havoc among churches over the last one hundred sixty years. Whether it was the accepting of Darwin's evolutionary theory, the denial of the Deity of Jesus Christ, the rejection of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scriptures, the introduction of corrupted Bible versions, the denial of the virgin conception and birth of Jesus Christ, or the rejection of the reality of miracles, it is painfully obvious that the state of Christianity in Europe and in the United States of America has suffered greatly because of this. Furthermore, we now see the prevalence of prosperity theology that is merely greed masquerading as spirituality, using God as a genie to get what we want; and this is heretical, but people are embracing the slick looking, smooth speaking men who present the therapeutic pep talks that make folks feel better. Ultimately, these things affect worship and morality, and bring great harm. We must separate ourselves from grave doctrinal error.

Separating From Schismatics

While the principle of separating from doctrinal heretics is real, so is the principle of separating from practical heretics. Heresy is primarily schism, which is simply division. Some divisions are doctrinal. Other divisions are practical. Some people have correct doctrines but have poor practices and are fractious, contentious, and disturb the peace and well-being of the body of Christ by their contention or by introducing harmful practices. Paul commanded Titus to warn the divisive person two times and then avoid him or have no fellowship with him (Titus 3:10). Why is this seemingly extreme course commanded? Because the person who will not heed godly warnings about divisive and harmful behavior is corrupted and sinful, and his own heart and behavior condemn him (Titus 3:10-11). It is imperative to note that, while many ironically condemn biblical separation as being judgmental, this passage teaches us that the one being separated from has condemned himself.

John, while being considered the apostle of love, shows us that love will separate from those who create divisions. Notice he spoke concerning Diotrephes, a man who decided that he would be the ruler of the local church where he was a member, refused to receive and help God's men, and excommunicated those who did help God's men and stated that he would remember Diotrophe's words and ways. In other words, rather than Diotrephes being the one casting out, he would be rebuked and cast out unless he repented. Not only so, but John commanded the church to follow good, and that those who did not follow good are not of God. (3 John 9-11). This is nothing less than the principle and doctrine of Biblical separation from divisive people being described and put into practice.

Few people think of the great damage that divisive people cause and fail to realize that separating from them in a godly fashion will do much good. Whether it is immorality as seen in 1 Corinthians chapter five, false doctrine and divisive actions as seen in Galatians (See Galatians 2:11-14;5:9-12), or wagging tongues, anger, unreasonableness, and strife as seen in James, divisive people do much harm. The leaven of sin spreads. Anger festers, builds up, comes to a head, and erupts, causing much damage. Notice James' statement: "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." (James 3:16) We can expect all sorts of sin to flourish in the presence of division and strife, and that is why we must call divisive people to repentance and then separate if they refuse to amend their hearts and ways.

A Warning Against Compromise

Scripture also teaches us that we must be on our guard against compromise and separate from it when we see it. We are warned that friendship with the world is enmity with God and spiritual adultery (James 4:4). Scripture commands us to love our God supremely, and that love for the world denotes an absence of love for God in our hearts (1 John 2:15-17). We know that the LORD rebuked Jehoshaphat for joining in with wicked Ahab (2 Chronicles 19:1-3). The text heading this article also teaches us that light and darkness, righteousness and wickedness, Christ and Satan have no true fellowship. We cannot stand with our feet in both worlds but must choose between the two.

Why is compromising a thing to guard against? Compromising is a joining of forces with those who are believing or practicing wrongly, and is a lending of support to them, which makes us partakers of their wrongdoing. Paul warned Timothy against partaking of other men's sins (1 Timothy 5:22), and we have already seen that John spoke similarly (2 John 10-11). We must beware of compromising and choose to separate, or we will be guilty of aiding and abetting others in their sins.

While it may not be quite as obvious as in other issues, compromise is ground for separation as well. Notice that compromise makes one a partaker in another's evil deeds. Just as one who is present with another when a crime is committed is considered an accessory and one who helps is considered an accomplice and both are considered guilty of the crime, so it is with compromise. When we know of ministers and churches who offer fellowship to heretics or compromise with immorality, we must exercise separation from them as guilty of the same spiritual misdeeds. Their compromise demonstrates their sympathies to those sinning and demands our separating from them so that they will not affect us with the leaven of compromise.

Separation Vs. Isolation

Separation, as we have seen, is a Biblical doctrine and practice. We are often prone to extremes, however, and can sometimes take separation too far and become isolationists. We cannot totally separate ourselves from the presence of sinners, or we would have to leave the world. This is what Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Jesus prayed for His people, not that they would be taken out of the world, but that they would be kept from evil (John 17:15). It is easy to stand aloof from others, look down our noses as the Pharisees did, scorn and criticize, and become "holier than thou," but that is not separation. That is isolationism, and it is contrary to the commands of God, who told us that we should seek to convert our erring brother (See Matthew 18:15-17; James 5:19-20; 1 John 5:16).

Paul's directions to the Corinthians concerning the man in an incestuous relationship was that they should separate but not isolate themselves from those in immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). The

purpose of separating was two-fold: it was for the purity of the church, so that the leaven of sin would not spread, and it was for the spiritual good of the one being separated from, so that he would come to repentance. It seems to have been successful, because Paul later wrote to them and admonished them to show grace and love in forgiving him (2 Corinthians 2:1-11). With this in mind, we conclude by asserting that the Biblical doctrine and practice of separation is a positive doctrine that seeks the holiness of the church and the repentance of those from whom we separate.