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Separation in the Christian's Social Life

Friendships

While the Christian is to exhibit genuine love for all of mankind, the Word of God makes it clear that a believer is to be discriminatory in the choice of his close companions (see Psalm 119:63). Solomon saw that, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20). The Apostle Paul likewise noted, "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33). As Dr. John Whitcomb has observed, "All things being equal, bad apples make good apples go rotten, and the good apples do not make the rotten ones any better." Thus, while the Christian is to be cordial towards all, especially towards those of like precious faith, he, nevertheless, is to be selective in his choice of close companionships. The best way to do this, of course, is to have the right interests, and to allow our interests to govern our close friendships.

Courtship

If ever there were an area where neglect of separation has led to heartbreak, it must be in the realm of courtships. How often have we heard stories of a Christian dating a non-Christian for the sake of witnessing, with a resultant unscriptural (and usually disastrous) marriage. Yet the practice of Christians dating unbelievers continues. Since it is certainly not God's will for a child of God to marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers"), one is hard pressed to defend any position other than total separation of Christians and non-Christians in the area of dating.

Career

As Dr. C. F. Yoder (*God's Means of Grace*, p. 468) has stated, "In occupation the Christian should remember that God is his senior partner." The Christian should therefore beware of making partnerships with unbelievers. Moreover, the Christian businessman must be discriminative in his business methods. The dishonest practices which are a matter of course in many firms are to be put away from the Christian in the business world.

Separation in the Christian's Spiritual Life

The personal devotional life

In order for the Levitical priests to enter into the Holy of Holies, they themselves had to be holy. The Christian, then, ought to be discriminative in his own devotional activities. This would apply, for example, to the Bible version which he reads. Peter says, "Desire the sincere (pure) milk of the word . . . (1 Peter 2:2). A paraphrase may be good for occasional comparison, but it ought not to be the daily food for the Christian's soul. The prayer life, too, ought to be purged from all that is unfit for God's presence. The Christian, especially the young Christian, ought to make a distinction between talking to the Lord of Hosts and "shooting the breeze" with his dormitory roommate.

Fellowship with other Christians

The Apostle John says, "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). The joy of fellowship with other true believers is indeed a blessed assurance of the Christian's salvation. Nevertheless, the Word of God plainly teaches that there are times when the obedient believer must purposefully part company with disobedient fellow Christians. This is true in the case of a brother who is living in sin. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no, not to eat (1 Corinthians 5:11).

This is also true, however, in the case of a brother who teaches doctrinal error or who fails to obey the truth:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us . . . and if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14).

This instruction seems like hard medicine to swallow, but as the Apostle points out, it is in order that the brother in the error may take stock of himself and turn from it.

The Church

If a Christian is to be separated from individuals who hold to and teach doctrinal error, he most certainly is to be separated from entire assemblies with the same problem. Withdrawing from a much loved church which has fallen into error is not easy, but it may remedy the problem. In any event, it is unethical to remain in and teach a doctrinal position contrary to that held by the assembly. The Christian ought to withdraw in such a case, and pray that God will open the eyes of the congregation.

AXIOMS OF SEPARATION

(Condensed from Pastor John E. Ashbrook's book by the same name)

1. Scripture forbids us to have fellowship with unbelief.
2. Scripture commands us to reprove apostasy.
3. Scripture teaches us that we must purge unbelief if we can.
4. Scripture teaches that believers and unbelievers cannot be yoked together in spiritual endeavor. (II Cor 6:14-18)
5. Scripture teaches us to separate from disobedient brethren.
6. God's work done God's way produces only good results. God's work done man's way produces good and bad results.
7. Do not affiliate your church with any church, mission, movement or evangelistic effort which does not fully believe the Word of God.
8. Do not affiliate your church with any church, mission, movement or evangelistic effort which does not practice biblical separation.
9. You cannot preserve a position without crusading for it.
10. When in doubt, don't join.
11. Separation is not the answer to every disagreement between brethren.
12. The spirit of God has never led one Christian contrary to one word of the Word of God.
13. At any given time of church history, God is most severe on those whom he is using at the moment.