

### “Separation”

The theme is pastoral this year — the three messages will deal with

- ✓ The issue of separation
- ✓ The issue of sincerity
- ✓ The issue of simplicity

Read vol. 2 of Murray's biog. of MLJ and you will understand the issues of separation. I grew up in a context in which there were high walls of separation for fundamentalism, but fundamentalism ate itself alive and many in ministry now do not know anything of that generation and movement.

The fundamentalism that was cruel needed to go away and it did, but there remains now a need for a need for a biblical understanding the issue of separation.

There needs to be a clear distinction between believer and unbeliever, which has been muddied by a lack of clarity about church membership — a mingling of light and dark.

Passage is what you would expect — 2 Cor. 6:14 —

The summation statement is in 7:1 — this kind of separation is a cleansing from defilement — both internal and external, leading to a fear of God.

There is a difference between being a Christian and a non-Christian. That line is significantly blurred in our church culture. There are two opposing forces — Christ and Satan, light and darkness. They are utterly distinct and mutually exclusive. They cannot have fellowship on any true spiritual basis. One perishes. The other lives forever. Believers *cannot live in both those worlds*. Rom. 12:2 — it's a clean break. Be transformed.

The Corinthians were trying to live in both worlds. It was a challenge to make a clean break. Corinthian culture was characterized by the worship of false gods — deviant. Pagan nations in the past blended their religions into the social fabric — it was part of everything. So to come out you had to come out completely and there was tremendous pressure to remain or return to that from which they had been delivered.

Demons were assaulting the church — there was the temptation to a syncretistic worship that would make them less exclusive and less different making Christianity more “easily received.” There's nothing new. Today there is an attempt to blend Christianity to culture. The result of the compromise was so frightening to Paul that he demands in ch. 6 a total break, no matter the cost. The bottom line is in the first statement in 6:14 — *do not be bound to unbelievers*. Be absolutely distinct from the culture and unbelievers. The rest of the discussion is an exposition of that one command.

Paul is not saying “don’t take to non-believers.” He understands the ministry of the gospel. He is not calling for isolation from unbelievers. He is calling for the church to be a separate entity from the world. He is not saying to divorce unbelieving spouse... The issue here specifically relates to harnessing believers and unbelievers together in any spiritual form of worship and spirituality.

You can’t marry the church to the culture. You can’t yolk them together. The church is a separate entity. From the very beginning the church identified believers and knew who they were. They were a separated people. The Corinthians were having trouble letting go.

Now false teachers were coming in and bringing a false gospel to accommodate the culture. The issue is religious, spiritual cooperation and compromise with false teachers and doctrinal error. The true church must separate from all that. We don’t get together with unbelievers in prayer meetings. We don’t get together in any kind of enterprise with unbelievers for any spiritual purpose.

Five reasons and motives for this separation —

### **1. To be bound together with unbelievers in any ministry is irrational**

Believers and unbelievers cannot be yoked together because they are working in opposite directions. **Four questions** provide the reasons that this is irrational —

- ✓ for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness

The defining element of unbelievers is that they are lawless by behavior and choice. They may hang around the kingdom because of wheat and tares, but the Lord will come and sort it out and some will be burned — those whose lives are characterized by lawlessness.

Cf. Heb. 1:9 — God hates lawlessness.

Cf. Eph. 2:12 — strangers, no hope, without God.

On the other hand, believers are righteous, forgiven, have a new nature, and now servants of righteousness. It is irrational to assume that those who are righteous could work with those who are lawless.

- ✓ *what fellowship has light with darkness?*

Light and dark cannot co-exist. The difference between dark in light is clear throughout Scripture — cf. 1 Jn. We have been called out of darkness into light. There can be no partnership.

These first two questions have to do with our very nature. There is nothing that relates the one to the other. There is no common intimacy or commonality in worship. It is an utter impossibility.

That’s why the Bible calls for a separation of the church from the culture. You want to make sure that your church is a called out group of people from the world. Any attempt at fellowship

in common is ridiculous, confusing to the world.

✓ *what harmony has Christ with Belial?*

There is a difference in leadership between the two realms. Unbelievers are always subject to their father the devil. The place where he and his followers want to ply their trade is in religion.

There is a fundamental distinction at the highest level. Christ has no partnership with Satan. He threw him out of heaven forever and he will end up in the lake of fire for all eternity. And his followers will end up in the same place for the same duration.

To cooperate in the same kind of realm of activity is blasphemous. Christ uses Satan; He does not fellowship with Satan.

A son of Belial is the ultimate worthless one.

Such fusion should never be an evangelical strategy; it's always a satanic strategy.

✓ *what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?*

The basic beliefs and foundation are mutually exclusive and different. How can two walk together unless they be agreed? (Amos 2)

## **2. To be bound together with unbelievers in any ministry is sacrilegious**

This is taken from the fifth rhetorical question — Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? Cf. 2 Cor. 10 — you can't partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. You are either part of God or part of a demonic system. There are only two options.

You can't combine devil worshippers with God worshippers and call it a church or a Christian enterprise.

A church is a defined group of people who are Christians and have separated themselves from Satan — you can't put God in the same building as Dagon.

Cf. also 2 Kings 21. The evil of Manasseh is that he re-embraced with the culture, built idol altars in the house of the Lord. It's a sad, horrendous story. The compromiser was worse than the wicked nations themselves (v. 9). It didn't go well for Manasseh or the nation (cf. vv. 14-15). It was clear when they entered the land what they were to do — clean it out — and they didn't. This is typical and disastrous.

Ezekiel's vision in Ezk. 10 — he sees the horror of sin, then "ichabod" and the glory of God leaves. The glory of God is gone.

Pagans don't mind joining Christians. They are willing to embrace Christians — it provides

them legitimacy. So we can't join unbelievers in any enterprise that enjoins God's name. That's blasphemy and sacrilege. If we join with unbelievers in a spiritual enterprise, we have put Dagon in the temple. And it is the worst if we call them believers on the other side and speak of any kind of common religion and faith.

Paul confirms this by an accumulation of OT references.

[Aside: when NT writers quote OT writers, they often use a translation that may not strictly adhere to the OT text. Sometimes they quote the sense of it, as an illustration or analogy. Sometimes they give even the general sense of all Scripture. But always they quote as authoritative and only the OT. So here you have a mosaic, summarizing a great truth of the OT.]

We are the dwelling place of God both individually and collectively, making the union of believer to unbeliever sacrilegious.

### **3. To be bound together with unbelievers in any ministry is DISOBEDIENT.**

God says — come out, be separate and do not touch (v. 17). How separate? Do not touch. You have been given the grace of God dwelling in you — and because of such a great privilege, be separate. We have no other option.

The call to the Corinthians is the same as to Israel — shun all forms of false religion. It will eat like gangrene. Cf. Rev. 18:1ff — a picture of the false, final religious system. What is the message to the believer in that day and situation? Vv. 4-5 — “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

Read Lev. 20-21 — separation because of the holiness of God. Believers of all ages have always been called to this level of separation.

How restrictive is it? Don't touch it. It's a touch of intimacy — don't fornicate with the world. It's a canal, harmful touch. 1 Jn. 5:18 — it's the touch of the evil one.

### **4. To be bound together with unbelievers in any ministry is UNPROFITABLE (vv. 17b-18)**

What does “welcome you” mean? If you want to experience the favor of God, don't do this. There can be no real fellowship and favor and blessing with and from God until you become separate from worldly idolators.

Don't think you gain anything from God with such alliances.

There is great benefit and reward for the believer who does not compromise — *I will be a Father to you...* The idea is that God embraces those who separate themselves.

I just don't ever want to get to the end of my ministry and want to wonder if I did it or God did it. And I always want to do everything I can to make sure I do things to obey the Word of God and be in the place of blessing.

I can make decisions that cut off divine blessing from my people. If I do something like that what happens to my people and family and wife...?? It doesn't mean we are sinless. But it means that I am separate to enjoy His favor.

He is the Father and we are His children who must repudiate all false alliances and false religion is the worst of all those alliances. Saul is a sorrowful picture of that truth — the kingdom was ripped away from him.

I want all the discipline I need to be holy and no more! I will take educative discipline; I don't want corrective discipline.

We don't identify with false religion. We confront it.

## **5. To be bound together with unbelievers in any ministry is UNGRATEFUL (7:1)**

*Therefore* — because we have all the promises that come to being a child of God, then there is a conclusion...

How ungrateful would I be to the God who has taken up residence in me and poured out endless promises on me? Will I spurn all His blessings to receive the accolades of men? In exchange for the favor of God? I don't think so.

There is only one fitting response. Verse 1 — *cleanse ourselves*... It is a corporate cleansing (*let us*). From what? From unbelievers. He is talking here about religious prostitution and harlotry. We are to cleanse (*kathartizw*) ourselves from anything like that.

If we cleanse ourselves we will enjoy the fullness of His blessing. If we violate His command, we lose the blessing of God.

Christ is our full desire and joy.

**Conclusion:** Dt. 7:1-5 — when you face unbelieving culture your goal is not to accommodate it but to liberate unbelieving souls from it. Why do this? Because you are a holy possession of a holy God — vv. 6-8. What do you owe to Him? Obedience and honor.