



SEPARATION *from False Churches*

Shaun Willcock

“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” (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

Christians are commanded to live separated lives unto the Lord. We are to be separate from the world; but we are also commanded to be separate from all those in spiritual darkness, infidels, idolaters, etc. – *even when* they profess to be Christians. For their profession is a false one. We must not worship with them, fellowship spiritually with them, or work with them in spiritual matters. This means we are to separate from all false religion, including all false churches.

How clear the commandment of v.17 is! “Wherefore *come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*”. We are to come out from among the ungodly and the unrighteous; to separate from all such people in our worship and in our service for the Lord. We are not to touch that which is unclean in God’s sight. This is the will of the Lord! It is never His will for us to be in spiritual fellowship with those still dead in their sins. Light and darkness do not mix! Children of the light are forbidden from entering into spiritual communion with children of darkness.

This is not optional – it is a divine commandment. True Christians are to separate from all followers of false religion, including those who merely claim to be Christians, but are not. In this article we will be focusing on false Christians and false churches.

False churches abound in our day, as never before. But they have been around since the first century AD. In our English Bible the word “church” is used where the Greek word has the meaning of “assembly” or “congregation”. Thus there are false assemblies, false congregations, just as there are true assemblies of Christ.

Rev. 2:9 says, “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” In the symbolical language of Revelation here, “Jews” means Christians – inward or spiritual Jews according to Rom. 2:28,29 – and therefore we know that “synagogue”, as used in this verse, means church. Even in the first century there were false professing Christians – “them which say they are Jews, and are not” – who formed “the synagogue” (or the church) of Satan. Satan had his churches even then, and he has them still. The devil has always had his counterfeits.

The Duty and Necessity of Separation from False Churches

THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK WITH A LOUD VOICE

2 Cor. 6:14-18 shows us that Christians are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. And Deut. 22:10 tells us what unequally yoked means: “Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.” An ox and an ass are unequal, and if they are yoked together they will not plow properly. They will work in different ways. They will not work in unison, their plowing will be erratic and in the end, useless.

Gospel truths are hidden in the law of Moses. An ox was a clean animal under the law, and an ass was unclean. This verse taught the godly among the Israelites that they were not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. It would be the clean with the unclean. In worship, fellowship and Christian service, believers and unbelievers are not to be yoked together.

We have seen the divine duty and the necessity of separation in 2 Cor. 6:14-18. But it is taught in many other parts of God’s Word as well:

The divine duty and necessity of separation is seen in Rev. 18:4,5: “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

Christians (note: “*my people*”) are commanded to separate from Babylon. “Babylon” here is not the literal Babylon which existed in Old Testament times, for that was destroyed centuries before. In this verse the mystical Babylon of the New Testament period is meant – which is none other than the Papal system, the Roman Catholic religion. As Christians we are to come out of her. We are to forsake her entirely!

But only some Christians were once Romanists, so to whom does this verse refer?

It refers to *all* Christians! For there are many *trappings* of Romanism to be found in the lives of true Christians, and we must forsake such things. And furthermore, if we have spiritual fellowship either with Roman Catholics or with any of those who are part of her abominable daughters (see below), we are sinning against the Lord and breaking this commandment.

The divine duty and necessity of separation is seen in Heb. 13:12,13: “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”

Jesus was rejected by the *professing* people of God of His day, the Jews (especially their leaders). They put Him to death “outside the gate” of the city of Jerusalem. That city represented the *professing* people of God (and there is a great difference between what people profess to be, and what they really are); and just as Jesus suffered at the hands of the professing people of God of His day, so His disciples will suffer at the hands of those who are the professing people of God today. If we love and follow Him, we must go to Him where He is – which is outside the camp. He is outside the professing camp of Israel. He is outside the places which falsely claim to be His churches. He is not there! He is the great Head of the Church, but He is not the Head of the numerous institutions falsely claiming to be part of the true Church.

The Lord’s people must not expect those in the false churches to love them. They hate Christ, and they will hate His people – even while they claim to follow Christ! Believers must separate from them by going to where Christ is: on the outside.

The divine duty and necessity of separation is seen in Rom. 16:17: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and

avoid them.”

Those who profess to know God and to follow Christ, but who hold to heresies and confuse weak Christians, causing divisions and offences by their false doctrines – all such, believers are commanded to avoid. This means separation! Have nothing to do with them, spiritually.

The divine duty and necessity of separation is seen in 2 Tim. 3:1-5: “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: *from such turn away.*”

What a catalogue of evil! And yet v.5 tells us they “have a form of godliness”. They *profess* to be Christians, and to worship the true God. They are liars, for their works reveal them to be false professors. We are to turn away from such, and to be separate! We are not to have anything to do with them in matters of worship, fellowship, etc.

Yes indeed, the Scriptures speak with a loud voice. Believers are to separate from, to come out from among, to avoid, to turn away from, those who falsely claim to be Christians. And this means we must separate from individual false “Christians” – people who are Christians in name only – as well as from false “churches”.

No child of God has any business remaining in a false church! It is *never* the Lord’s will for him to stay there. He is to come out from among them, and be separate. This is the divine commandment. It does not matter if leaving such a place will mean you are entirely alone, with nowhere to go. This is your duty, and it is the *only* path of obedience to the Lord.

There is a great difference between separation and isolation. We must not isolate ourselves from *genuine* believers, but we must separate from *false* ones. And if our separation from false churches necessitates that we are in a position of isolation (because there are no true churches nearby), so be it – our isolation does not alter the fact that it is still the Lord’s will that we separate from what is false. “Better stay at home and read God’s Word, than fellowship with that which His Word condemns” (Arthur W. Pink).

TWO OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

There are those who object to what has been said above by pointing to Heb. 10:24,25: “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

This Scripture is often appealed to by those who say that the believer *must* “go somewhere”, even if the only place he is able to attend is not biblically sound. This is great error! This Scripture means that true Christians must not forsake the *genuine* assemblies of the Lord’s people. Note the wording: “the assembling of *ourselves* together” – i.e. *real* Christians. It is not commanding us to remain in fellowship with false churches, contrary to all the Scriptures we have already examined.

If at all possible, Christians must come together as local churches of saints. But where this is not possible, it is always sinful to fellowship with false churches.

In addition, true churches of Christ should enjoy communion with other true churches, wherever possible. We see this in the New Testament. Yes, churches are to be independent, and no denominations should be formed. But wherever possible Christian churches should maintain happy and precious fellowship together, in different ways. They may even maintain fellowship with sound churches which are not precisely one with them in every doctrine, as long as they are one with them in all doctrines essential to be known and believed for salvation, and in holy and separated living.

But we are *never* to have fellowship with those religious institutions which hold to heresy, or let their members live ungodly lives.

Another objection, widely popular, is made by pointing to Jn. 17:20,21, which multitudes use to justify fellowship with all kinds of wicked religious institutions: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one”.

The Ecumenical Movement is a worldwide, satanically-directed movement, its purpose being to unite all institutions which call themselves churches of Christ into one giant conglomeration. The Roman Catholic religion is the largest of all, and it desires to take control of all other so-called churches, by getting them to submit to its authority. And among “Protestant” churches (which are Protestant in name only), the World Council of Churches is at the forefront of this drive for a One-World Church. They are well on the way towards achieving this objective.

Those who desire to unite all kinds of institutions together and calling them the Church of Christ, justify this by referring to the prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17:20,21, saying that we must all do whatever we can to fulfil it.

However, this prayer of the Lord has already been answered! For the Father *always* heard the Son: in prayer to the Father, Jesus said, “And I knew that thou hearest me always” (Jn. 11:42). When He prayed, therefore, for all His followers to be one, this prayer was answered. *All true Christians* are spiritually one in the Father and the Son. They form the one true Church of Jesus Christ.

And note for whom Jesus prayed in Jn. 17: those who *believe on Him* through the Word. True believers in Christ! Not all that “mixed multitude” who profess to truly believe on Him. Only genuine Christians, to whom the Lord has given the gift of faith, and who have called upon His name and been saved from their sins.

Believers are already one with all other true believers. But they are not one with men of Belial, and never will be – even if they call themselves Christians!

Let us consider the specific false churches from which the Lord’s people must separate. Many would object to being specific at this point, and actually naming these false “churches”. But the Lord’s people need to know. This is not a time for generalities; for beating about the bush. *We must be specific!* Just as the Bible names names when it comes to individual enemies of the Gospel, so we must name names when it comes to religious institutions calling themselves churches, yet utterly unworthy of the name. These are false churches, from which the Lord’s people must separate.

The False Churches from Which True Christians Must Separate

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC “CHURCH”

The very first false church from which true Christians must always remain separate is the Roman Catholic institution: Rev. 17:1-5.

This is the largest false church in the world. It is also the most wicked. For its entire long history it has been the greatest enemy of the true Church that has ever existed. Through the centuries it has been the greatest enemy of the true Church that has ever existed. It has persecuted the saints of God, destroyed the Bible, and today it hates them just as much as it ever did – only now it pretends to be their friend.

Romanism is filled with false doctrine: Mary worship, the worship of so-called saints and angels and relics, salvation by works, purgatory, baptismal regeneration, confession of sins to a mere man, and so much more. It is full of all kinds of abominations. It is nothing but the old paganism of Babylon in a supposedly “Christian” dress; and it has murdered millions of true Christians through the centuries.

Every saint of God should keep absolutely separate from this spiritual Babylon. Come away from it entirely, as Rev. 18:4 says!

If a Christian joins in spiritual fellowship with Roman Catholics; if he worships with them, prays with them, etc., he is committing great sin against the Lord. Romanism is a temple of idols (2 Cor. 6:16). Those who love the Lord are to flee from all idolatry, to come out from among all idol-worshippers, and be separate. The Papists' worship is heathen worship. Their "christ" is a false "christ". Their "church" is a harlot, not the virgin bride of Christ.

But Rev. 17:5 shows that the Roman Harlot has daughters! "And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." She has given birth to other false churches, which copy their mother in many of her evil ways. And we must separate from these as well!

Now within some of these daughter institutions there may at times be *some* true Christians, who are there out of ignorance. No true Christian believes the doctrinal errors and sinful practices of these institutions. But it is possible for some, particularly those who are newly converted and thus "babes" in Christ, to be found associating with them, for a time, out of ignorance about the true nature of these false churches. Be it noted, such a believer is *not one* with them. But being ignorant of their errors, not being properly taught or warned, he might for a time attend their services, etc. Especially is this so when the errors are of a more subtle nature. He should not be there! He must be exhorted to leave, and shown why. He must "come out" of these false religious institutions, and be separate.

THE ANGLICAN AND LUTHERAN "CHURCHES"

Two of Rome's daughters are the Anglican and Lutheran institutions. They retained many of the false teachings and heresies of Rome. To mention a very glaring heresy, and a damnable one at that, both these institutions teach the heresy of *baptismal regeneration*. Even if there was nothing else, this would disqualify them from being true Christian churches. This is the belief that when a person, even a child, is "baptized", he becomes a child of God, regenerated, his sins washed away, a Christian! This lie from the pit of hell has led untold millions into a Christless eternity.

How then can Anglicanism or Lutheranism be Christian? It is impossible. We must have nothing to do with them. It does not matter what good there may be in them as well, or what they may have taught at one time which was biblical. The fact is that they teach a baby becomes a child of God at baptism. And *no* Christian church ever teaches such a damnable heresy.

Much could also be said about their ungodly practices, their acceptance of vile sins and of those who commit them. These are abominable daughters of Rome indeed.

ALL ECUMENICAL "CHURCHES"

We must also remain completely separate from all ecumenical institutions, i.e. all those "churches" – it does not matter what denomination they belong to – which are in fellowship with the Roman Catholic system; or with the World Council of Churches, or any of its local branches; or which have joined other ecumenical organisations; or with any which in any way teach and proclaim that it is God's will for all so-called "churches" to come together; to unite. As we have seen, this is never God's will. For then true Christians would be in fellowship with all kinds of evil, Christ-denying, Bible-denying men and women.

We cannot support the Ecumenical Movement in any way whatsoever. It is an abomination before God. It must be shunned for the evil that it is.

ALL LIBERAL "CHURCHES"

We must also remain completely separate from all liberal institutions. In religious matters, liberals are people who are "open-minded". They criticise true believers for being too "narrow-minded", too

strict, and for being Bible-believers! They do not believe the Bible is the completed Word of God; they do not believe Christ is the only way to the Father; they hardly ever believe in hell; they reject salvation by grace through faith; they question the Trinity; they believe the church should be involved in supporting the overthrow of governments, even by violent means; they are ecumenical; they indulge in all kinds of things which the Bible calls sinful; they have no problem with people changing what the Bible says, or re-interpreting it to suit modern trends (such as feminism, homosexuality, etc.); etc.

No true Christian is a liberal in doctrine or practice. And no true Christian is to have fellowship with liberals or liberal “churches”, because these deny the very truths of Scripture which the child of God holds dear.

Today, liberal “churches” include the vast majority of the so-called “mainline” denominations – Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, and even Baptist – and a great many others as well.

ARMINIAN “CHURCHES”

The true Christian must also remain separate from Arminian “churches”. Arminianism is the belief that God did not elect some people to salvation in Christ, but rather that man has a free will and is able to either choose to accept or reject Christ. Arminians do not believe the scriptural truth that Christ died only for the elect – they believe He died for all men. They do not believe that once a man is in Christ, he is in Him forever – they teach that a man is able to lose his salvation by his own free will. They believe, in summary, in a God who is not all-powerful, but in all-powerful man. *This is a false gospel.*

Arminians, in fact, deny all the doctrines of grace: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. And we are not to fellowship with “churches” which deny fundamental truths of the Gospel. We are not to join with “churches” which say that Christ died for all men, and that all men may be saved if they only exercise their free will and choose Christ, when the Scriptures categorically deny such things.

Many today are horrified when we say this. They think we should happily rush off to fellowship in Arminian churches. They are wrong! Arminianism is another gospel – a false gospel. Yes, many Arminians have been Christians, out of ignorance. But that does not justify us lowering the biblical standard of separation and attending Arminian churches.

Which churches are Arminian today? Answer: almost every single one! At one time Arminianism was confined largely to Wesleyan Methodism and one or two other denominations, but today it is rife throughout the vast majority of denominations.

PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC “CHURCHES”

We also must not join in fellowship with Pentecostal or Charismatic “churches”. We must remain completely separate from them. These “churches” deny the finality and all-sufficiency of the Word of God; they permit all sorts of doctrines and practices which are completely unscriptural, because for them the Word of God is not final – they emphasise experiences and “new revelations”, even if these contradict God’s Holy Word.

How could it be right for the child of God fellowship with such churches? It is sinful. These are not true churches. They are filled with heresy and unbiblical behaviour. We must remain separate from them all.

WORLDLY “CHURCHES”

Finally, there is one other type of false church from which we must remain separate. Its evil is so subtle that many fall for its charms. This is the “church” which is doctrinally sound on paper; it has a good Confession of Faith; but – it is worldly in practice! Its members live ungodly lives. They do not separate from sinful pursuits. They live like people in the world.

In recent times there has been something of a revival of interest in the doctrines of sovereign grace, in

some quarters. But much of the time it is nothing but intellectual head-knowledge! There is no corresponding change of life, no conformity to the holy standards of God's Word.

We must turn away from such worldly false churches as much as from one which is full of false doctrine (2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 Cor. 5:11). Those who call themselves Christian brethren, or whom others call brethren, but who are living unholy lives, must be separated from. They must be avoided, for they are hypocrites who profess one thing with their mouths, but live opposite to what they profess.

It is not enough that men have sound doctrine. They must also live holy, separated lives. Sound doctrine, when truly held in a regenerate heart, *will result* in a holy, separated life unto the Lord. And where we do not see this, we must turn away from such lifeless professing "churches", where Christ is worshipped with the mouth but not with the life.

Conclusion

The Christian's duty is plain from the Scriptures. Yes, it is often a lonely walk. It was lonely for Noah; for Abraham; for Moses; for Elijah; and it has been (and still is) for many of the Lord's saints. Let men call us names, say that we are isolationists, etc. – we must remain obedient to our Lord, and separate from the camp of professing Israel, which hates the truth and hates the people of God, for it hates the very Son of God it claims to worship.

In the midst of our cities and towns full of "churches", we must remain separate from all the false ones – and in our day this means the vast majority of them – and fellowship only with the true saints of God, who meet in biblical assemblies. We must pray for one another, support one another, love one another; but from the rest we must *come out* from among them – from the mass of worldlings who claim to be Christians, yet whose hearts are far from the Lord; and be separate. Touch not the unclean thing.

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