



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 who walk in spiritual darkness – *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. We are to separate from all false religion, *including all false churches*.

How clear the commandment in 2 Cor. 6:14-18 (quoted above)! “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. As we live in the world, we rub shoulders with the people of the world in day-to-day matters, at places of employment, etc.; but it is *never* His will for true believers to be in ecclesiastical or spiritual fellowship with those still dead in their sins. Light and darkness do not mix! Children of the light are forbidden to enter into 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 so in truth.

False churches abound in our day as never before, although 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, “Jews” refers to Christians – inward or spiritual “Jews” according to Rom. 2:28,29 – and therefore a “synagogue”, as used in this verse, symbolises a “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 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

We have seen the divine duty and the necessity of separation in 2 Cor. 6:14-18: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”. Deut. 22:10 tells us what it means to be unequally yoked: “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 not work in unison, their plowing will be erratic and in the end, useless.

Gospel truths are couched 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.

In addition to 2 Cor. 6:14-18, there are many other places in God’s Word which command separation from false Christians and false churches. Here are some of them:

The divine duty and necessity of separation is taught 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. By “Babylon” is not meant the ancient literal Babylon of Old Testament times, for that was destroyed many long centuries ago. It refers to the mystical “Babylon” of the New Testament period, which is none other than the Papal system, the Roman Catholic religion (Rev. 17:1-6). As Christians we are to come out of her. We are to forsake her entirely.

Rev. 18:4,5 not only addresses true Christians were once Romanists, but *all* Christians. For if we have spiritual fellowship either with Roman Catholics or with any of those who are members of her abominable daughters (see below), we are sinning against the Lord. In addition, there are many *trappings* of Romanism to be found in the lives of true Christians, and we must forsake these as well.

The divine duty and necessity of separation is taught in Heb. 13:12,13: “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without [outside] 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 typified the *professing* people of God (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 suffer at the hands of those who falsely profess to be the people of God in all ages. 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 religious 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 falsely *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 taught 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 taught 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! Yet v.5 tells us they “have a form of godliness”. They *profess* to be Christians, and to worship the true God. But 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 to have nothing 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. 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, having no church to attend. 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).

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 frequently appealed to by those who say that the believer *must* “go somewhere”, even if the only church 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 certainly not commanding the true saints of the Lord to remain in fellowship with false churches, contrary to all the Scriptures we have already considered, and many others in addition.

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. Local churches are to be independent, and no denominations should be formed, for these are unbiblical; but wherever possible Christian churches should maintain happy and precious fellowship together, in various ways. This includes maintaining 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 religious institutions which call themselves churches into one giant conglomeration. The Roman Catholic “Church” is the largest of all, which desires to take control of all other so-called churches by getting them to submit to its authority. And among false “Protestant” churches (Protestant in name only), the World Council of Churches is at the forefront of this drive for a One-World Church.

Those who desire to unite all kinds of “churches” together, calling such a conglomeration the Church of God, 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.

Note for whom Jesus prayed in Jn. 17: those who *believe on Him* through the Word. True believers in Christ! Not the “mixed multitude” who profess to believe on Him, but only genuine Christians, to whom the Lord has given the gift of faith, 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!

Another objection: “I’m in it to win it! If all true believers leave, it will get much worse.” True – it will. But that is not your concern, if you are a true child of God. *You* are to follow the Lord, going to Him “outside the camp” regardless of what others do. Those who say that they remain “in it to win it” are unable to justify such a sinful stance by even a single verse of Scripture. The Lord does not command *any* of His children to remain within false churches to hopefully “change them from the inside”. This is nothing but an excuse to take no stand, and to ignore the plain teaching of God’s Word regarding separation.

Let us now come to specifics, and name some of the false churches from which the Lord’s people must separate. Many would object to us doing this. 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. The Lord’s people must separate from all false churches.

The following section is by no means exhaustive.

Some of the False Churches from Which True Christians Must Separate

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC “CHURCH”

The first and greatest false church from which true Christians must always remain separate is the Roman Catholic institution. It is specifically described in Rev. 17:1-5, in great detail.

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. 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.

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 filled with false doctrine. It 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 to remain utterly separate from them. In addition to its gross idolatry, Romanism is also full of many other abominable doctrines and practices: 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 also full of all kinds of vile and abominable practices. It is nothing but the old paganism of ancient Babylon in a supposedly “Christian” dress. It has murdered millions of true Christians through the centuries. The Papists’ worship is heathen worship. They worship a false Christ. Their “Church” is a harlot, not the virgin bride of Christ. No Roman Catholics are true Christians. Every saint of God must keep absolutely separate from this wicked spiritual Babylon. Come away from it entirely, as Rev. 18:4 says! Yes, a “babe” in Christ, a new convert, may mistakenly attend a Roman Catholic “church” *for a time*, out of ignorance; but being a true Christian now he is no longer a Roman Catholic, and within a short time he *will* forsake it, for he will come to see (as the Holy Spirit makes the Word known to him) that it is a false religious system.

And 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 the Lord’s people must separate from these as well!

THE ANGLICAN AND LUTHERAN “CHURCHES”

Two of Rome’s daughters are the Anglican and Lutheran institutions. They retained a number of the false teachings and heresies of Rome. To mention a very glaring heresy, and a damnable one at that (2 Pet. 2:1), both these institutions teach the heresy of *baptismal regeneration*. Even if there was nothing else, this alone would disqualify them from being true Christian churches. It 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, for they have trusted in their “baptism” and not in Christ. How then can Anglicanism or Lutheranism be Christian? It is impossible. We must have nothing to do with them. *No* Christian church ever teaches such a lie of the devil.

Some have attempted to explain away the heresy of baptismal regeneration by denying it means what it does, at least within their denomination, and they have tried to give it a more “evangelical” interpretation. But in addition to this damnable heresy, these institutions are also *riddled* with ungodly practices, shocking to the biblically-formed sensitivities of all true Christians. Much could be said about their many ungodly practices, and their acceptance of vile sins and of those who commit them. And there is also the fact that both have always been hybrid monsters, uniting “Church” and State, and even persecuting those who have differed with them. Their errors, both doctrinal and practical, are numerous and vile. We are to have nothing to do with such wickedness. They are abominable daughters of Rome indeed.

Now within some of these daughter institutions of Rome, these false churches, there may at times be *some* true Christians. But let us be very clear at this point. It is true that no true Christian believes the doctrinal errors, or holds to the 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 out of ignorance about their true nature. Be it noted, such a believer is *not one* with them. But being ignorant of their errors, not being properly grounded as yet in God’s Word, he might attend their services, etc. Especially was this so in past ages, when the errors of some of them were of a more subtle nature (as opposed to Popery’s errors, which are numerous and glaring); but today these institutions are *riddled* with sinful practices. A true Christian should not be there, and he must be firmly exhorted to leave, after being shown its errors. He must “come out” of these false religious institutions, and be separate – and he *will* come out, once he understands their errors. No *true* believer would even want to remain within these false churches, once he knows the truth about them.

ECUMENICAL “CHURCHES”

We must also remain completely separate from all ecumenical institutions, i.e. all those “churches” – it does not matter to which denomination they belong – 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 any which teach and proclaim that it is God’s will for all so-called “churches” to unite. As we have seen, this is never God’s will. True Christians are *never* to fellowship with a mixed multitude of Christ-denying, Bible-denying men and women.

The Ecumenical Movement is an abomination before God. It must be shunned for the evil that it is.

LIBERAL “CHURCHES”

We must also remain completely separate from all liberal religious institutions. In religious matters, liberals are people who are (as they claim) “open-minded”. They criticise Bible-believers for being too “narrow-minded”, too strict, and for believing that *all* the Bible is divinely inspired, the very Word of the living God. Liberals do not believe this; many do not believe Christ is God, or that He 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 radical politics, even supporting the overthrow of governments by violent means; they are ecumenical; they indulge in all kinds of things which the Bible reveals as sinful; they have no problem with people changing what the Bible says, or re-interpreting it to suit the times (with regards to feminism, sodomy, etc.); and more.

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, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, even certain Baptist denominations – and a great many others as well.

ARMINIAN “CHURCHES”

The true Christian must also remain separate from Arminian “churches”. Arminians deny the doctrines of sovereign grace: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. 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 whenever he likes. 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. In summary (although they would deny it), they do not believe in a God who is all-powerful; instead they believe in all-powerful man. *This is a false gospel*, and believers are not to fellowship with churches which deny such fundamental doctrines 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 readily fellowship with Arminian churches. But Arminianism is another gospel (2 Cor. 11:4) – a false gospel.

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 – even those which might still say the opposite on paper, in their confessions of faith.

However, it is important to remember that one is not saved by holding to a correct understanding of election or predestination. One is saved by *faith in Christ!* And no one, at the time of his conversion, has a *perfect* understanding of Christ, or His Gospel of grace. Thus there have been Arminians who

are genuine Christians, out of ignorance of the doctrines of grace. But recognising that there are some Arminians who are converted does not justify lowering the biblical standard of separation and attending Arminian churches! It is one thing to attend a local church consisting of people who really appear to be sincere, faithful believers, but who are simply untaught, or taught incorrectly, regarding the doctrines of grace, the difference between biblical truth and Arminianism, etc., and are therefore Arminian out of sheer ignorance of sound teaching. They need proper teaching, not rejection. It is quite another matter when a church *knows* the difference, but deliberately rejects and even opposes the truth and maintains the Arminian error. No fellowship should be had with such a church.

PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC “CHURCHES”

We must also not join in fellowship with Pentecostal or Charismatic “churches”, but remain completely separate from them. They deny the doctrine of 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, because they claim the gift of prophecy is still given today; they are emotion-driven, experience-oriented “churches”; etc.

For the child of God to fellowship with such churches is sinful. They are not true Christian churches. They are filled with heresy and unbiblical behaviour. We must remain separate from them all.

Again, however, as with certain Arminians, *some* genuine Christians, being “babes” in Christ, may through ignorance attend such “churches” for a time. But they must be properly taught, and shown that they are to forsake such false assemblies completely. There is no excuse to remain.

WORLDLY “CHURCHES”

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 worldly lives. They do not separate from sinful pursuits.

Beginning around the mid-twentieth century, there was something of a revival of interest in the doctrines of sovereign grace in many places. All too often, however, this proved to be nothing but intellectual head-knowledge! There was no corresponding change of life, no conformity to the holy standards of God’s Word. Sound doctrine is only one side of the coin; holiness of life and separation from what is displeasing to the Lord is the other, and it is equally as important.

We must turn away from such worldly false churches as much as from one which proclaims false doctrine (2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 Cor. 5:11). Those professing to be Christian brethren, having sound doctrine in the head, but who live 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.

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 we must *come out* from among the rest – 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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