

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SEPARATION?

By

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As a believer, can you say that you practice Biblical separation? Unfortunately in this day and age that statement must be qualified. Please notice that it does not say “your brand of separation” but Biblical separation. Since the Bible is the final authority in faith and practice, let’s study what the **Scripture** says about separation.

I. Biblical Instruction

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness (defilement, an action by which anything is defiled) of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 7:1

As we begin this study, let us look at the context of this passage. Paul was admonishing the church at Corinth. They were beginning to follow after the ways of the world. They were fellowshiping with unbelievers and people from others religions. Paul urges them to separate themselves from these opposing philosophies. He defines the promises referred to in this text verse (7:1) in the previous chapter. The command begins in verse 13 of chapter 6, *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 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. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18*

This is one of many passages that define the Biblical doctrine of separation. This doctrine is not popular with many people. In fact, its unpopularity ranges from the unsaved to the Baptists ranks. Yes, there are Baptists who ignore, water-down, and even despise the doctrine of separation. For example, the outline of this message was preached by this author in a Baptist church sometime ago and afterwards the Pastor said, “I don’t preach much on that subject.” Unfortunately this is all too common in this day and age.

It is clear that the unsaved do not understand this doctrine, for the Bible says in **1 Corinthians 2:14**, *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* But why do believers shy away from separation. Why is this Biblical doctrine of separation so unpopular and even despised? Is it truly a Biblical doctrine? Or is it a man made tradition based on one or two verses?

Let’s see what the Bible says about separation.

1. THE CHRISTIAN IS TO LEAVE (OR SEPARATE FROM) THE WORLD – THEY ARE TO RUN TO GOD

The doctrine of separation is not one that can be dismissed on the grounds that it is founded only on one or two verses. In the verses below, it is quite obvious that believers are to withdraw, avoid and have no fellowship with a certain group of people. The key word in New Testament separation is “fellowship.” **Fellowship is establishing a close relationship.** Therefore, as Christians, the Bible commands us **not** to have “**fellowship**” with the world. Albeit, we must always be friendly, kind and loving to everyone that we meet.

These verse are very obvious and clear in their explanation.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 *For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;*

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 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. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

Psalms 1:1-2 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

We are not to walk (meaning – fellowship) with the world.

3 John 11, *Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*

2 Thessalonians 3:6, *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.*

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, *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. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

Matthew 18:17, *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

Romans 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.*

1 Corinthians 5:11, *But now 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 Timothy 6:5, *Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*

1 Thessalonians 5:14, *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.*

Amos 3:3, *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

2. THE CHRISTIAN IS NOT TO LOOK LIKE THE WORLD – THEY ARE TO REFLECT CHRIST

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:1-2

Unfortunately there are many believers who are letting the world determine their life style. In Romans 12:1-2 we are implored to give our bodies over to God as a **living** sacrifice. We are the ones that make the choice as to who will govern our conversation (life style). Each Believer has already made the choice as to what or who will govern them. What are the choices?

Romans 12:2.

1. To be **conformed** to the world, or

2. To be **transformed** by the word.

This is where many Christians get confused. They don't realize that they have already made the choice to either be conformed or transformed. If we have not purposed to be transformed to God, then we are automatically being conformed to the world.

Each one of us has already made a choice. There is no neutral ground. If we are not being **“transformed”** by the Word of God, then we are being **“conformed”** to the world.

This can be better explained by asking the following question: “How many sides does a circle have?” The answer is - 2 – the inside and the outside. Everyone starts outside the circle. So unless we decide to deliberately step inside the circle, we will remain on the outside. This can also be applied to salvation. We all begin outside of salvation until we willingly repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

Now let's look at the choices as we find them in verse 2.

A. Be not conformed to the world.

The dictionary definition of the word **“conform”** [*suschematizo*] means – to fashion (one's) self according to some outward stimulus. (To conform one's self to another's pattern, it is **outward**; fashion one's self according to); e.g. to shape one thing like another and describes what is transitory, changeable, and unstable.

It gives the idea of outward conformity. Here is an example: Playdoh pressed into mold will take on the shape of the mold but it is still play-doh. So, therefore, according to this verses, Christians can be **conformed** (put into a mold) **to the world**. What is the **“world?”** *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, (1) the lust of the flesh, and (2) the lust of the eyes, and (3) the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 1 John 2:15-16*

Please keep in mind that a born-again believer is not **“of”** the world, but they can be conformed **“to”** the world.

If a person comes to your house that is dressed like the world, acts like the world, talks like the world, listens to the world's music, and goes to worldly attractions, you can surmise that that person is of the world.

Matthew 7:16-20 *Ye shall know them by their fruits.* *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20* *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

When you conform to the world, dear Christian, you are letting the world set your priorities. You are making your decision based on (1) *the lust of the flesh, and (2) the lust of the eyes, and*

(3) *the pride of life.*

PLEASE LISTEN, THE BIBLE SAYS,

*... 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 Cor. 6:17-7:1***

It has to do with the heart. Your heart will eventually be made manifest through actions.

B. Be ye Transformed . . .

The word “transformed” comes from the Greek word “*metamorphoo*” (this is where we get our English word - metamorphosis). It means: to change into another form, to transform, to transfigure, i.e. on the mount of transfiguration Christ’s appearance was changed into a divine brightness. Mt. 17:2. We are all familiar with the example of the caterpillar changing into a butterfly.

With the believer, this metamorphosis or transformation starts from the inside, and then works out. It is only natural for an unsaved person to act and look like the world, because they do not have Christ in them. But the Christian has been sealed by God’s Holy Spirit, ***Ephesians 1:12-14*** *That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. 13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

THIS TRANSFORMATION CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE WHEN YOU GIVE YOUR TOTAL BEING TO GOD (holy, acceptable, Romans 12:1). THEN YOU CAN ASK GOD TO TRANSFORM YOU INTO HIS IMAGE BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND.

The word “renew” gives the idea of renovation, to refurbish, to repair, to fix up. God will begin to renew or renovate your mind through His Word after we obey the commands just prior to that thought. We must delight in His Word. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.* **Ps 1:1-3**

We must live God's Word, *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. 10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.* **Ps 119:9-10**

We must hide God's Word in our heart, *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* **Ps 119:9-11**

IF YOU YIELD YOUR BODY TO GOD, AND THEN LIVE BY HIS PRINCIPLES, THEN AND ONLY THEN WILL YOU WILL BEGIN TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. **2 Cor. 5:17**

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. **Eph. 4:22-24**

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: **Col. 3:10**

The doctrine of separation is truly a Bible doctrine. Is it taught and practiced in your church? Obeying this Biblical doctrine will affect everything about your life. It will affect the people you choose to fellowship with, the clothes you wear, the music you listen to, the things you read, the things you look at, the places you go, and the things that you watch.

II. Practical Application

Now that we have seen what the Bible says about separation, let's apply these verses to our everyday living. There are three areas that this Biblical doctrine touches. They are, ethical separation, ecclesiastical separation, and political separation.

1. Ethical Separation

A. From the Philosophy of the World

The first realm of separation that we will look at is, ethical or personal. The Bible teaches that each individual believer is to be separated from the world, unto Christ, *1 Thessalonians 1:9*, *For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*

Romans 12:1-2, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

2 Corinthians 6:14-17, *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.*

2 Timothy 3:5, *...Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

As mentioned above this doctrine will affect the people you choose to fellowship with, the clothes you wear, the music you listen to, the things you read, the things you look at, the places you go, and the things that you watch.

B. From the Disobedience of Man

The New Testament also teaches that believers should not fellowship with those who are disobedient to the Word of God.

3 John 11, *Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*

2 Thessalonians 3:6, *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.*

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, *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. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

Matthew 18:17, *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

Romans 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.

1 Corinthians 5:11, But now 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 Timothy 6:5, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

Amos 3:3, Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Even though these verses are self explanatory, they are unfortunately conveniently overlooked in fundamental Baptist circles today. As New Testament believers, this type separation puts restrictions on marriage, close friends, places of attendance, etc.

God wants us to separate from that which is not in line with his Word (e.g. people, churches, etc.). For if we do not separate, then we will be brought down to a lower level of spirituality. This principle is found in 1 Corinthians 15:33 ...*evil communications corrupt good manners*.

Let's illustrate it this way. If a Christian with high Biblical standards fellowships with a Christian with little or no standards, the first Christian will always eventually drop his standards.

PROPER SEPARATION WILL NOT DRIVE OTHERS AWAY FROM GOD; ON THE CONTRARY, IT WILL PULL THEM UP TO HIM.

Please remember that the key word in New Testament separation is "fellowship."

Fellowship is establishing a close relationship. As Christians, we must always be friendly, kind and loving to everyone that we meet. But when it comes to fellowship, we must be careful that those we are close to are of like faith and practice. If a Christian begins to fellowship with those who are disobedient to God's Word, it is inevitable that that Christian will compromise his position in order to keep the relationship. This is very hard to do, especially when it comes to family members and relatives. But, are we going to obey God's Word or not? The choice is yours. If you want to grow spiritually, you must obey God's Word completely. Therefore, it is best to obey the Bible and separate. Remember ...*evil communications corrupt good manners (1 Corinthians 15:33)*.

2. Ecclesiastical Separation

The second realm of Scriptural separation is ecclesiastical. We are to separate from apostasy. Just as our Lord has his churches, Satan, the imitator, has his false churches. True New Testament churches will only fellowship with other churches of like faith and practice. Therefore, a New Testament church should not fellowship with churches that do not practice New Testament doctrine.

2 Corinthians 6:14-17, *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.*

2 John 10-11, *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.*

Amos 3:3, Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

A New Testament church can and should only have close fellowship with those of like faith and practice. This does not mean that we are to be hateful exclusivists who look down on all who are disobedient to God's Word. On the contrary, we are to love and show mercy to all mankind.

3. Political Separation

The third realm of separation to which Baptists adhere is political. As Baptists, we believe in a separation of church and state. Baptists believe what Christ taught in Mark 12:17, that there should be separation between the church and the state. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.*

The New Testament teaches that the state ought to stay out of the affairs of the church and vice versa. The New Testament says nothing about a state church, state religion, or state ordinances, when it comes to spiritual or religious matters. Even though we believe in the separation of the church and state, this should not be construed as the elimination of God from the state as the American Civil Liberty Union is proposing. They would have us believe that all government decisions should be void of anything that has to do with God. In order to avert the ruination of our nation, God must never leave the minds of the government. **Ps 33:12**, *Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.*

For a nation to have Jehovah God as their LORD simply means that that nation will follow the commandments of the LORD and submit to His authority as He gave it in His Book, the Holy Bible. When that nation ceases to follow His commands, they will cease to be blessed.

In Conclusion

As New Testament believers, we are to stay as far away *from* the world's philosophy and standards as possible. **James 4:4**, *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* On the contrary, we are to stay as close to Christ and His Word as possible. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: **Philippians 2:5.***

If we follow God's commands as found in His Word, then Jesus will be lifted up and that is what will draw the lost soul to salvation. *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. **John 12:32.***