RELIGIOUS SEPARATION

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Thesis: The Bible reveals that true worshippers of Christ must separate from apostates and compromisers.

Read Genesis 4:3-8.

Introduction

Following the fall of Adam and the human race, the Bible records the struggle between Cain and Abel. This event gives us understanding of God’s way of preserving true religion through all generations.

Abel worshipped God in spirit and in truth. By faith, he brought and acceptable offering and enjoyed communion with God. According to truth, his offering was a slain, bloody sacrifice from the flock, picturing the bleeding Lamb of God. “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (Hebrews 11:4).

Cain’s worship lacked faith. His offering was without sacrificial blood and was likely the invention of his own imagination. God rebuked and warned him. Yet Cain, with a corrupt and hateful heart, arose in anger to slay his brother. He committed this horrible crime “because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” (1 John 3:12).

God’s ways are not man’s ways. The Lord’s enemies seem successful in their attempt to remove faith from the earth, but Christ preserves His people. The history of the Bible is a history of this great conflict.

The Lord Jesus Christ reigns over His true worshippers. They constitute His Kingdom or Church, which He purchased by the sacrifice of His precious blood. On earth, the Church often appears as a “bruised reed” and “smoking flax.” It does not have power, wealth, public esteem, or mighty armies. Yet God’s sovereign grace brings each member of His Church safely to heaven. Following the Lamb, even through the furnace of suffering, His Church is triumphant over all its enemies.

While on earth, this body of true worshippers is the Church militant. In heaven, it is the Church triumphant. Having journeyed through the wilderness of this world, leaning upon their Beloved, members of Christ’s kingdom are received into a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. In that place, they see the face of their Savior, have every tear wiped away, are forever with the Lord, and dwell with unfallen angels and the souls of just men made perfect.
There is another kingdom identified in the Bible. It is the kingdom of darkness. Its head is Satan. Beginning with Cain, the Devil built his kingdom into a massive structure including all his human subjects in hell and upon earth. It also includes the hosts of demons, or fallen angels, who are reserved for judgment. The Devil’s subjects have obtained immense earthly power and wealth. It has also established a false Church which has a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof. This system of antichrist is the bitter enemy of the Son of God and His true Church. Although the Devil’s kingdom prospers on earth, each of its members will suffer untold torment in the burning lake of fire forever. They will share hell with Satan and the fallen angels.

Satan is a relentless enemy. He has determined to destroy Christ and His Church. In order to accomplish this goal, he attacks Christ’s kingdom from without. He attempts to overcome true worshippers of Christ by slander, persecution, torture, and murder. But the more he spills the blood of Christ’s martyrs, the more the Church prospers.

Satan devised another scheme to subdue the kingdom of Christ. His plan involved an attack from within. By making his servants appear as angels of light, he tries to lead professing followers of Christ astray. This internal warfare is presently raging in the Church.

The Devil realizes he needs two special kinds of servants to effectively execute this plan. One is the apostate and the other is the compromiser. The apostate is one who professes the truth faith of Christ, but turns from it and rejects its essential teachings. Apostates devote themselves to deceiving others by attacking Christ and His doctrines.

The other servant is more devious. He is the compromiser, who professes the true faith of Christ, but encourages and helps apostates. Compromisers have different policies. Some are in obvious sympathy with apostates. Others appear to protest against apostasy, yet they encourage God’s people to allow apostasy to grow without resistance. Apostates and compromisers are deadly enemies to the Church.

What should the true Church of Christ do to defend itself against apostates and compromisers? Its weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. While calling upon the Head of the Church for deliverance, it must also look carefully into God’s Word to see if there is a way to escape Satan’s subtle attack. There is a way. The Bible reveals that true worshippers of Christ must separate from apostates and compromisers.

1. The first reason why they must separate is that God’s wrath is upon apostates.

   A. The Lord’s people must separate from apostates.

      Paul warned the Galatian Christians: (Read Galatians 1:7, 8). Why would true worshippers of Christ give support to those who are under God’s curse? Lot left Sodom and did not turn back. He fled from the wrath to come. How foolish to remain in fellowship with the objects of God’s anger.

   B. The Lord’s people must not only separate from apostates, they must also separate from those who compromise with apostates.
God’s wrath is upon the compromiser as well. The Lord Jesus warned the Church: “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.” (Revelation 18:4)

The Devil’s false Church is no place for professing Christians. There is a plague upon those who remain in fellowship with it. There is also a plague for those who are outside of Satan’s false Church but still give aid to Christ’s enemies. Jehu the prophet asked King Jehoshaphat: “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.” (2 Chronicles 19:2)

Although the compromiser justifies his attachment to the enemies of God, the Bible condemns him. The compromiser may claim a deep love for his fellow man, but God warns him to reject Christ’s enemies: (Read 2 John 9-11).

II. Another reason why the Lord’s people should separate from apostates is that the Bible directly commands them to do so. (Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

A. Here is clear instruction for those who have ears to hear. When men turn from Christ and His doctrines the followers of the Lamb know they must turn from these enemies of their Lord.

John Knox said:

This is the league betwixt God and us: that He alone shall be our God, and we shall be His people. He shall communicate with us of His graces and goodness; we shall serve Him in body and in spirit. He shall be our safeguard from death and damnation; we shall seek to Him, and shall flee from all strange gods. In making which league, we swear solemnly never to have fellowship with any religion, except with that which God has confirmed by His manifest word. [John Know, Selected Writings of John Knox (Dallas, Texas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, c. 1995), 172.]

B. The Bible also demands that believers in Christ separate from compromisers. (Read Romans 16:17 & 2 Thessalonians 3:6.)

How blessed would the modern Church be if it would separate from those who cause “divisions and offenses” and from those who walk “disorderly.” Of course, the Church would lose great numbers. No longer could it boast of its riches and worldly power. Instead, it would have the glorious presence and blessing of Christ. Compromisers have multiplied and now dominate the professing Church. Yet Christ is not discouraged or confused. He is in sovereign control of it all. God’s elect rest in the truth
that the Lord Jesus will build His Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

When J. Gresham Machen made his valiant stand against apostate liberalism in the early 1900’s, he lost the day. The defeat was not because of liberals, but because of compromising moderates who did not want trouble in the Church. The northern Presbyterian Church is reaping the consequences to this very day. There are few, very few, who understand that compromisers are Christ’s enemies. Instead, compromisers are crowding into places of leadership and directing the professing Church into a storm of chastening. One of the reasons they gain these positions is because the message they preach appeals to so many. By removing offensive doctrines and devising their own methods of worship and ministering, churches are inundated with unregenerated members. Because compromisers serve large churches, and are loved by all, they are thrust into the highest levels of denominational power. The tragedy is that Christ’s sovereignty over the Church is trampled under foot and eternal souls are cruelly deceived. The Lord Jesus told the Laodicean Church: (Read Revelation 3:17, 18).

III. Another reason why the Church should separate from apostates and compromisers is that fellowship with Christ’s enemies will bring the Lord’s judgment.

Christ warned the Church in Pergamos: (Read Revelation 2:14-16)

The Lord Jesus walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, that is, in the midst of His Churches. He knows if His enemies are finding refuge in His Church. Pergamos received a solemn warning because of failure to rid the Church of the Lord’s enemies. The modern Church is no different. To harbor apostates and compromisers is an offense to the Head of the Church. He has the power to humble His people and to separate the wheat from the chaff. “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (I Peter 4:17)

IV. Finally, the Lord’s people must separate from apostates and compromisers because Christ is pleased with those who honor Him in this way.

Our Savior commended the Church of Ephesus for its refusal to accept His enemies: (Read Revelation 2:1,2).

When a Church becomes corrupt and lacks the will to discipline, the faithful follower of Christ must still separate from apostates and compromisers. He is comforted by God’s Word: “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.” (Hebrews 13:12, 13)
In John 9, the Lord Jesus healed a man who had been blind from his youth. This man defended Christ before the apostate religious leaders and was promptly removed from the synagogue. However, he received a most glorious blessing. The Bible records: (Read John 9:35-37).

Those who separate from apostates and compromisers follow Christ. Separation is not an end in itself. It is a means of glorifying Christ and bearing His reproach. When John Calvin was accused of schism, he answered his opponents as if he were before the judgment seat of Christ:

With regard now to the accusation which I have been compelled to hear so frequently, that I am an apostate from the church, my conscience accuses me not, unless he ought to be called a traitor who, when he sees the soldiers in a battle leave their ranks and take to flight, seizes the standard, and raising it on high calls them back to the fight.... On which side the sin is, do Thou, O Lord, determine! Often have I, by word and deed, evinced how desirous I am to preserve unity; but that is to me the right unity which has its beginning and its end in Thee. Whenever Thou hast commanded us to preserve peace and unity, Thou hast also taught us that Thou alone art the bond of this unity. But to continue in peace with those who pretend to be the rulers of the church and the pillars of the faith, I must have purchased it at the expense of denying Thy truth. All danger however would have been preferable to incurring the guilt of yielding to such a condition; for Christ has told us, ‘Though heaven and earth pass away, yet shall not My Word pass away.’ I did not therefore consider that I was apostatizing from Thy church, because I contended against these oppressors; for Thou didst warn us by Thy Son, that leaders of the church would arise with whom we must not be of one mind. It was not said of strangers, but of the pastors themselves, that they would be ravening wolves, of whom we must beware. How then could I give the hand of fellowship to such?  

[Stebbing, Henry, The Life and Times of John Calvin (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), pp. 152, 153]

**Conclusion**

God’s elect will separate from false religion because their hearts are knit with Christ. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will refuse to bow to the false idol. The fiery furnace may be their lot, but the Song of God is their salvation. There will come a final day of separation. (Read Matthew 25:31,32)

The prophet Isaiah asked, “What will you do in the day of visitation?” Jesus Christ is still the Refuge for sinners. Though Satan and his followers use all their hellish schemes to destroy the people of God, those who come to the bleeding Lamb with true faith and repentance, will be forever with the Lord. The shepherd will lose none of His sheep and He will deliver each one of them from the Devil’s lie: (Read John 10:3-5).