

THE DOCTRINE OF SEPARATION AS TAUGHT IN 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14 - 7:1

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Dr. John E. Janbaz prepared this study in 1984 at the request of the moderator of the Bible Presbyterian General Synod. It is a small part of a large report studying the doctrine of separation. The report, with contributions from men throughout the Synod, was called for at a seminal time in the history of the Bible Presbyterian Church. The issues addressed by the report remain as important—and as controversial—today as they were almost thirteen years ago, and require the same kind of humble, intense, and prayerful study to deal with them properly. Dr. Janbaz' effort is an appropriate starting point for this issue of the WRS Journal.

-Ed.

A Whole Bible Principle

Second Corinthians 6:14-7:1 is the key Scriptural passage presenting in a capsule the biblical principles for the historic separatist position. Therefore it calls for a careful exegesis in order that we might understand grammatically and historically the teaching of this portion of God's Word relative to separation and then apply these principles to our own lives and ministries.

The context of this passage is Paul's dealings with the many problems in the Corinthian church, exhorting the believers to turn away from idolatrous practices to a mode of life consistent with their profession, faith in Christ as their Savior. For example, 2 Cor. 5:17 reads, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Verse 20 states, "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ..." And 6:4 urges, "Giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed; but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God..." After this series of exhortations to a holy life in the midst of many trials, in our text the Apostle lays down the basic requirements for a life well-pleasing to the Lord.

However, this doctrine of non-fellowship with, or separation from, sin and unbelief is not only a New Testament teaching. The Spirit of God laid down the groundwork for this clear command for separation from sin and doctrinal impurity in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 7:1-11 is a key passage. First, in the second verse, the children of Israel are commanded to make no covenant of any type with the seven heathen nations of Canaan. No alliances or political treaties were to be made with the surrounding pagans. Also, see Exodus 23:31-33 and Judges 2:1, 2. Second, in verse three the Israelites were commanded not to intermarry with non-believers. Exodus 34:16 and Joshua 23:11-13 speak to this command also. Third, in verse five, though we are not in our day to resort to the physical violence necessary then, surely the strong command here is that every Christian should not in any way, either by association or by silence,

of both, encourage the founding or growth of any religious teaching or practice contrary to the revealed Word of God.

A Compelling Argument: 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

Second Corinthians 6:14 simply states, “Be ye not unequally yoked together.” This command translates γινεσθε, a 2nd person plural imperative meaning “become not,” or “never let it happen,” in the sense of “God forbid!”—a strong exclamation from the verb γινομαι; and the present participle ετερζυγουντες, formed from the words ετερος, “another,” and ζυγος, “a yoke.”

The combined words used in the present participle could be taken as yoked with one of another yoke, since ετερος has to do with the difference in essence of a thing being compared, that is, it is “not of the same kind.” With γινεσθε, then, the thought is clear: do not seek an alliance with someone yoked to another, and if you are in such a yoke, do not continue in it. The yoke is indicated as being unequal if one party in the ζυγος is “unbelieving” or “without faith,” or in fact an infidel. We are instructed then not to be joined with those who are without faith, referring at this point primarily to marriage, but introducing a much wider application to any situation where our faith is in danger of being compromised. When we study the seventeenth verse it will become evident that the command of verse fourteen cannot apply to marriage alone. The Apostle Paul now enlarges the application of the whole area of separation in terms of five contrasts, or antithetical propositions. Let’s now follow Paul’s argument step by step to its logical conclusion so clearly commanded in verse seventeen.

Proposition #1—“What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?” (14b)

μετοχη: “fellowship,” “sharing.” This is the only time this word is used in this form in the NT. Other forms of the word are translated “partakers” (Hebrews 3:14) and “fellows” or “partners” (Hebrews 1:9). The root of the verb is μετέχω, “to share in,” “to partake with.”

ανομια: “lawlessness,” or “iniquity.” The dative feminine singular form of ανομος, “without law,” “not subject to law.” Used of the Gentiles in I Corinthians 9:21. Used substantively in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 for the Antichrist, ο ανομος, “the Lawless One, the Wicked One.”

δικαιοσυνη: “righteousness,” or “justice.” The dative singular from the verb δικαιωω, meaning “to pronounce or treat as righteous,” “to show to be righteous.”

The Christian’s righteousness is a gift of God. Read Romans 5:17, 2 Corinthians 5:21. We have no warrant therefore to bring this righteousness, which is not our own but Christ’s, into an ungodly relationship, or partnership, with one who lives outside the law of God, and indeed, is not subject to the law of God. The sinless Son of God was made sin for us that we might receive His righteousness, and this, His righteousness, we must not compromise by being in partnership with lawlessness. There can be no stronger basis for separation from sin and unbelief.

Proposition #2—“What communion hath light with darkness?” (14c)

κοινωνία, dative singular from the verb κοινωνέω, “to have in common,” “to share, to associate, to associate one’s self with (by sympathy and assistance). This word (κοινωνία) is used in 1 Corinthians 10:16 by Paul in reference to the Lord’s Supper: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (κοινωνία) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion (κοινωνία) of the body of Christ?” If anything, κοινωνία is a stronger word than μετόχη, indicating that our communion or fellowship is based upon the broken body and the shed blood of Christ and therefore should never be corrupted by an unequal yoke. The obvious truth is that light and darkness cannot possibly simultaneously exist in one person at any given time. Light and darkness are mutually exclusive.

φῶς, neuter noun from the verb φαίνω, “to shine.” The word is used in two ways:

1. Literally, “a light, a blaze of light” See John 11:9, Matthew 17:2. A source of light, Luke 22:56.
2. Figuratively, a light as an appellation of God. See I John 1:5. Also a symbol of truth and purity, especially the truth of Christ. See John 3:19-21. Used of Christ in John 1:7,8.

σκότος, “darkness,” from verb (σκοτίζω), “to darken, shroud in darkness,” also used in two ways:

1. Literally, “in darkness”
2. Figuratively, in moral and spiritual darkness, and the meaning here is just that.

The light, Who came into the world, was rejected by man in preference for darkness, and therefore, as followers of the Lord, Who is the Light, we must not be found in communion with the darkness of sin and unbelief. See Romans 13:12 and 1 John 1:5-7.

Proposition #3—“And what concord hath Christ with Belial?” (15a)

συμφώνησις, nominative feminine singular, “agreement,” from the verb συμφωνέω, “to agree with, agree together.” Other derivatives of the verb include συμφωνία, “harmony” (of instruments in music), also translated “music” in Luke 15:25; and σύμφωνος, meaning “harmonious,” or “agreeing with. See 1 Corinthians 7:5, “consent.”

Χριστός, a verbal adjective from Χρίω, “the anointed one.” A proper name, its Hebrew equivalent is *Messiah*.

βελίαρ: “worthless, lawless.” The Devil personified, Judges 19:22. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is the personification of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), the Devil is the personification of

iniquity (ἁνομία) See 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

Since it is not possible for harmony or agreement to exist between Christ, the Anointed of God, and Belial, the personification of the Devil, we, who are followers of Christ, cannot find agreement, or harmony, with those who are in agreement, or harmony, with the Devil in their unbelief and rejection of the historic Christian faith.

Proposition #4—“Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” (15b)

μέρις: “a share, a portion.” This word is also used in Colossians 1:12, where Christians are called “*partakers* of the inheritance of the saints in light.” We are, as believers, shareholders in the household of the faith—a part of the body of Christ, the church invisible. There is a line of demarcation between those who are shareholders in God’s kingdom and those who are shareholders in the Devil’s kingdom, for what portion does one who has faith (πίστος) have with one who has no faith (ἄπιστος)? The call for separation here goes beyond marriage and things social into the realm of the religious and spiritual. An obedient Christian cannot be found in a religious yoke with one who denies the faith. A believer cannot be in fellowship with a non-believer on any spiritual basis. He can have no share nor portion with unbelief, or with a denial of any aspect of the fundamentals of the faith, based on the self-evident fact that Christ, the anointed Messiah, cannot be in agreement or in a harmonious symphony with Belial, the Devil.

Proposition #5—“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” (16)

συγκατάθεσις, from συγκατατίθημι, “to set down together with, to be in alliance, to be in accord.” Again the Apostle is asking, “Is it possible for there to be an alliance, an accord, an assent between God’s holy temple in Jerusalem and the temples of the heathen gods?” The answer implied is, “Absolutely not!” No article here before ναῶ θεοῦ, but the term is almost a technical one, and in the mind of the Apostle clearly expresses “the temple of God.”

Surely every Christian would say without a doubt that there can be no agreement between God’s house and the house of idolatrous worship. But in 1 Corinthians 3:16 also, we read that we, in application, are the temples of the living God. Therefore, we as God’s holy temples, should find no agreement with, or toleration for, the godless idolatry being practiced in the eucumenical heathen temples of our day. Then in the last part of verse 16, he presents a blessed promise for those who agree with God’s Word in recognizing the clear line of separation in the five antithetical questions just proposed. Citing Leviticus 26:12, he assures the separated believer of a closer walk with the Lord who promises to dwell in us, to walk in fellowship with us, to be our God, and, finally, to give us the blessed joy of knowing that we are His people.

A command with Promise: 2 Corinthians 6:17 & 18

“Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. . . .” (17a, b)

Knowing man's proclivity towards disobedience and knowing that some of the Corinthian Christians were in an unholy alliance, Paul's next statement in conclusion is a clarion call for separation from any form of religious unbelief and sin. Any denomination that has officially denied one or more of the fundamentals of the historic Christian faith can legitimately and Scripturally be viewed as an idolatrous temple. Paul does not call for schism from the invisible church but from the idolatry and impurity of his time. He deals with the erring brethren in other epistles. In this passage he deals with unbelief and impurity with the clear-cut command for separation. Let us be certain, however, that this verse cannot be applied to a believing wife married to an unbelieving husband and vice-versa. Paul has previously dealt with this problem in 1 Corinthians 7:13-15. Please read. Clearly, 2 Corinthians 6:14 is a command for Christians not to intermarry with non-believers, but the rest of the passage reveals how untenable it is for any Christian to be in a yoke with godless religious individuals or organizations, such as the ecumenical churches and councils of our time.

ἔξέλθετε, second person plural imperative from ἐξέρχομαι, "to go away," to depart," "to go forth." Here a command, "Depart ye." It clearly means that the believer must depart, in obedience to God's command, from the company and fellowship of any so-called religious organization that is not committed to doctrine and practice to the historic Christian faith once delivered unto the saints.

ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν, "out of their midst," "out of their gathering," with preposition ἐκ, "from among them." For separation in the OT please read Psalm 1:1. In Isaiah 52:11 we read יֵרָדוּ, יֵרָדוּ, second person imperatives from יָרַד, translated here, "Depart ye" (repeated for emphasis) or "go ye out from hence." Verse 17 of our text is remarkably similar to this verse in Isaiah. If not a quotation, surely a citation from the passage in which Isaiah, in the midst of a Messianic section, calls upon Judah to depart and have no fellowship with the unbelieving Gentiles (called unclean and uncircumcised).

ἀφορίσθητε, second person plural imperative, from ἀφορίζω, "to separate from." Here translated, "be ye separate," i.e., "in a separated condition." God commands us to take definite action and a stand in relation to unbelief and compromise. It is a call to depart from it, if we are indeed in it, and to remain in a separated condition from it, in obedience to God's Word. This is a command. There are no options.

The religiously and morally unclean (ἀκάθαρτος, "impure;" see Acts 10:14 and Ephesians 5:5) is not even to be touched, let alone embraced. In fact, Ephesians 5:11 clearly states that not only are we not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but we actually are to bring them to the light (ἐλέγχω, "to convict," "refute," "reprove") so that they might be exposed lest others stumble in spiritual darkness.

"And I will receive you. . ." vs. 17c

εἰσδέξομαι, future indicative from εἰσδέχομαι, "I will receive you with favor."

In obedience to God's command for separation from sin and unbelief, we have the

assurance of a joyful reception into His fellowship with His blessing and favor.

“And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (18)

As a reward for our obedience we not only find fellowship with Him, but actually enjoy a closer family relationship as obedient children as we read in Romans 8:17, “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be glorified also together.” This promise of a very close family relationship between us as obedient children and our heavenly Father is irrefutable, for it is made to us by the Lord Almighty.

A Simple Application: 2 Corinthians 7:1

“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.”

This verse is properly the conclusion and application to ourselves of the passage in the previous chapter. Paul now concludes that in view of these promises (ἐπαγγελίας)—the promise to dwell in us, to walk with us, for Him to be our God, and we to be His people, climaxed with the promise that He will be our God and Father—we must then obey God’s command and live separated from worldliness and unbelief. This passage concludes with a strong exhortation to obedience. As Christians who enjoy these blessings (2 Cor. 4:7, 14; 5:17, 21; 6:17, 18), we must cleanse ourselves (καθαρίζω, “to cleanse,” “render pure”) from filthiness (πολυσμός, “pollution,” “defilement”) of the flesh (σάρξ, i.e., “outer man”) and the spirit (πνεῦμα, “inner man,” i.e., spiritual, unbelief), perfecting (ἐπιτελοῦντες, present participle from ἐπιτελέω, “to perform,” “to bring to a completion,” i.e., the continuous process of sanctification) holiness (from verb ἀγιάζω, “to set apart”) in the fear of God, as day by day we die unto sin (of the flesh and the spirit) and day by day we are made alive unto righteousness. 📖