

Biblical Separation

Leviticus 11:45 – “For I *am* the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy.” “... as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

If there is one thing that describes the essence of Who God is, it has to be *holiness*. Isaiah declared, “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, **Holy, holy, holy**, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:1-3). Revelation 4:8 says: “And the four [living creatures] had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, **Holy, holy, holy**, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” Here we have occasions when the seraphim and the living creatures, who are in the presence of God, declare Him to be “Holy, holy, holy!” The preeminence of God’s holiness is loudly proclaimed in heaven and the Lord tells us that that is also to characterize how we live. “The holiness of God is that attribute which governs the exercise of all His other attributes.... It is extremely important to recognize the preeminence of God’s holiness.”¹

On the first day of creation, God created light and “saw the light, that *it was* good: and God divided [to separate, to make a distinction] the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:4).² God separated the light from the darkness on day one, thereby laying the foundation for the understood answer to the question: “what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). Since God separated the light from the darkness, the implicit answer is that they have nothing in common; in other words, there is no fellowship, or intimacy (*communion*), between these two.³ The message of the Apostle John is that “God is light, and in him is [absolutely] no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5)⁴; Isaiah wrote, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy ...” (Isaiah 57:15). God is light and God is holy; if we desire to live in His light and holiness, as we must if we are to have fellowship with Him, then it is incumbent upon us to separate from all that is darkness and unholiness.

In heaven, the holiness of God is loudly proclaimed; but among Evangelicals today, the attribute of God that is given preeminence is love. By focusing on His love to a much greater extent than His holiness, modern Christianity has become a cesspool of compromise where virtually anything is acceptable; they envision God as being benevolent, tolerant and accommodating – Someone Who, perhaps, did not really need to send His Son to die for our sins for, after all, aren’t we actually good people deep down? By contrast, if you permit the love of God to be expressed through His holiness (as it rightfully is), then it becomes apparent that God had to send His Son in

¹ Ernest Pickering, Biblical Separation, p. 165.

² Strong’s Online.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

order to redeem a lost and fallen mankind because of His great love for the creature who bears His image – this is the balance that is evident in Scripture. The redemption of mankind, accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus, flows out of God’s love for mankind as it is expressed through His holiness – a holiness that cannot tolerate sin. In order for man to have a restored fellowship with his Creator, the sin that was a part of his nature had to be removed because God could not simply overlook it. The doctrine of Biblical separation is inextricably woven into the fabric of God’s holiness: God cannot abide sin; He is absolutely separated from all that is evil (Habakkuk 1:13a). Therefore, inasmuch as God is holy, He has called us to, likewise, abide in holiness; if we abide in Jesus, as He commanded us (John 15:4, 10), then our lives will reflect His holiness. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world, that **we should be holy** and without blame before him ...” (Ephesians 1:4). If we are *in Christ*, then we appear before God in the holiness of Christ – that is now our spiritual standing; however, in this life, we are called upon to grow in our sanctification (holiness). As Paul closed his first letter to the Thessalonians, his prayer for them was this: “And the very God of peace sanctify [to make holy; optative mood expressing a hope] you wholly [completely or through and through]; and *I pray God* your whole [entire or complete] spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless [a hope (optative mood)] unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).⁵ Paul expressed his sincere desire for the Thessalonians, knowing that the experience of complete holiness will only come when we are with the Lord for “we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Nevertheless, through the assistance of the Spirit of God, we are to develop in our holy living now: “But grow [*you must be growing*; present tense, imperative mood] in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:18).⁶

Perhaps it is because of the modern view of God among most Evangelicals (that He is love) that Biblical separation (that springs from His holiness) has not fared very well. Those who believe and practice Biblical separation are looked upon with disdain by everyone within the Christian community who has bought into ecumenism, which has flourished under the idea that God is primarily all loving. Of all of the doctrines of New Evangelicalism, which proved to be a significant catalyst for modern ecumenism, it was their disdain for, and repudiation of, Biblical separation that has taken the greatest toll on Christianity over the past seventy plus years.⁷ With the loss of this integral belief in spiritual separation from all who depart from the truth of the Bible, there was nothing left to prevent Evangelicals from being absorbed into the Liberalism of the day, and so ecumenism has become the accepted norm.

There are really only two primary applications for Biblical separation; it is important that we give consideration to this area where the Word of God has been sadly neglected to the spiritual detriment of so many. Biblical separation is not a popular topic for discussion among Evangelicals today and, in fact, it would be a rare occasion to ever hear this subject expounded by modern preachers. Despite having fallen on hard times, separation is nonetheless a living doctrine of the

⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

⁶ Strong’s Online.

⁷ “New Evangelicalism” was announced by Harold Ockenga in 1948, and his turning away from Biblical separation and turning to Liberalism were two things that were made clear from the beginning. New Evangelicalism was quickly absorbed into mainstream Evangelicalism so that, today, there is nothing *New* about it.

Scriptures, and we would do well to understand it thoroughly. Inasmuch as it flows out of the holiness of God, it would only follow that a good understanding of Biblical separation should assist us in coming to terms with His overwhelming holiness – the importance of this matter is heightened by the fact that He has commanded us to make holiness a part of how we live (1 Peter 1:15-16).

1. SEPARATION FROM THE UNGODLY

The first area for consideration is separation from all that is ungodly. *Ungodly*, as it is used in the Scriptures, is translated from several words in both Hebrew and Greek, and its primary application in each language is as an adjective that is used to describe people and not things. The most prevalent word in Hebrew is *rasha*, which identifies someone who is guilty of a crime, of hostility against God or of sin.⁸ In Greek, the most common word is *asebes*, which describes someone as being godless, unholy or profane.⁹ As we consider these definitions, it should be very evident that someone who is *ungodly* is absolutely not in a reconciled relationship with God – in fact, they stand in opposition to Him. Jesus said that unless we are *with* Him, we are actually *against* Him (Matthew 12:30) thereby clarifying that there is no third option; therefore, the *ungodly*, because they are not in a favorable position with God, abide under His condemnation – there is no neutral territory, no fence to straddle. The *ungodly* might be characterized by paganism, or they might just as easily appear to be (and profess to be) a worshipper of God; therein lies the great difficulty that faces everyone who desires to walk faithfully with the Lord: the ungodly pagans are most easily identified, but the religious ungodly often require a measure of keen Biblical discernment.

The more conservative Evangelicals today will accept, to some degree, the necessity of separating from the obviously pagan; they still acknowledge that there is some need for a difference between the pagan and the Christian, although it is becoming increasingly difficult to arrive at any consensus as to what that difference should look like. When New Evangelicalism hit mainstream Evangelicals in the late 1940s, it came at a time when there was a general exhaustion from holding the standard, which, if you think about it, indicates that there was an increasing effort to live the Christian life externally without the aid of the Spirit of God – in essence, the Biblical standard was already faltering. Therefore, when Harold Ockenga outlined a “Christian” position that professed to uphold the inerrancy of Scripture even while opening its doors to a reevaluation of many fundamental Biblical doctrines, Evangelicals were ready for the change and considered it to be a welcome relief from having to continually evaluate everything and everyone. The reexamination of Biblical doctrines being advocated was not for the purposes of reinforcing the authority of the Scriptures that had existed up to this time but, rather, to arrive at an understanding of the Bible that would not of necessity exclude the Liberal theologians and scientific “experts.” In other words, the goal was to set aside the historic understanding of God’s Word in order to embrace a new understanding that would permit them to join company with those intellectuals with whom Evangelicals were so enamored. The subtlety of this is that even while Ockenga promoted this compromise in order to gain favor with the *ungodly*, he appeared to hold to the Scriptures as being inerrant: “... inerrancy is the watershed of modern theological controversy ...

⁸ Strong’s Online.

⁹ Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

those who surrender the doctrine of inerrancy inevitably move away from orthodoxy”¹⁰ Unfortunately, Ockenga never recognized that what he was advocating as a New Evangelicalism was incompatible with an inerrant view of God’s Word; although he laid the blame for the massive departure from orthodox Evangelicalism upon those who took up the New Evangelical name, nonetheless, he was the one who opened the door.¹¹

The Psalmist has provided us with insight into how easily the downward slide can happen: “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly [*rasha*’], nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). Let’s look at how this can be applied to the New Evangelical departure that began with Harold Ockenga.

One of the planks of the New Evangelical platform was that they would now dialogue with Liberal theologians and worldly philosophers in an effort to gain some understanding of their position, conceivably to better reach them with the Gospel. However, as New Evangelicals began to walk and talk with the Liberals and the world (i.e., to walk *in the counsel of the ungodly*), they became increasingly at ease in their company and found that they had so much in common with them (they were now standing *in the way of sinners*). It wasn’t long before they looked with disdain on those who had not followed their lead – those who purposed to remain true to the Word of God (alas, they now sat *in the seat of the scornful*). The Psalmist outlines a downward progression (walk, stand, sit) and New Evangelicals followed it step-by-downward-step. What they failed to realize is that through their accommodation and compromise (which is the only way to unite with those who do not hold the Bible as an authority) they had completely lost the Gospel message; incredibly, they did not win the Liberals over to the truth but, conversely, the Liberals drew them away from God’s truth and into their camp. There is a clear evolution (really a “devolution”) here, and we must be alert and guard against even taking that first step of walking in the “counsel of the ungodly.” Biblical separation requires that we not be found with a favorable attitude toward the teachings of the *ungodly* that lie in contradiction to the inerrant truth of God’s Word.

Paul expounded on this truth to the Corinthians: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship [partnership] hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion [having in common] hath light with darkness? And what concord [agreement, literally, a sounding together] 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. 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 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).¹²

Could it be made any clearer? Paul provides a series of questions and each one calls for a resounding “nothing” or “none” as the answer. As we live in Christ, our purpose must be spiritual

¹⁰ Harold J. Ockenga, *Foreword to The Battle for the Bible*, by Harold Lindsell.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, “fellowship,” “communion,” “concord.”

purity, not physical unity: *holiness in the fear of God* rather than unity with those who have desecrated and marginalized God's Word. Purity has taken a beating by the popular emphasis on ecumenical unity; what we must not overlook is that spiritual purity and ecumenical unity will absolutely never stand together – they are a living example of light and darkness (*what communion hath light with darkness?*). Such unity is accomplished only through compromise, and purity can never survive any compromise of God's truth! We still read: "... but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling ... (2 Timothy 1:8b-9a); God's call is to holiness for everyone who has placed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1); our lives are to reflect the holiness of God – as we are called, so we are to walk (Romans 8:4). Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly common for those who call themselves Christians (even some who claim to be Fundamental Christians) to neglect, or even forsake, their holy calling and endeavor to justify their accommodation of pagan practices and traditions. Nevertheless, God's call to holiness has not changed.

The *ungodly* are made up of two definable groups: 1) the pagans, who are those who have never professed to believe **and** those who continue to profess but have never believed, and 2) the apostates who no longer believe. Paganism can wear many faces. For example, we might see a member of a hidden tribe of the Amazon basin and readily identify him as a pagan, but if we see a well-dressed gentleman who is an upstanding member of our society and a strong supporter of humanitarian charities, we might find it more difficult to attach the same label to him. James warns us against being unduly influenced by outward appearances (James 2:2-7), and Jesus, even as He calls upon us to *judge*, also counsels that we "judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). What we need to understand is that the realm of the *ungodly* can be difficult to navigate because it includes those who might appear to be very righteous. Of the outwardly righteous Jews, Jesus said, "... except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20); He saw past their façade to the spiritual vacuum that it covered. Jesus has given us insight in order to help us to be discerning: "Beware of false prophets, which come [*are coming*] to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening [*ravenous*] wolves. Ye shall know [*recognize*] them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-16a).¹³ *False prophets* are those who proclaim a message that might sound like the truth but it is not; within our terms, this could be someone who professes to be a Christian while they do not have a living faith-relationship with the Lord. Jesus tells us to watch their *fruits* for, as we do so, we will come to see past their *righteous* appearances and recognize their destructive natures. As we willingly submit to the leading of the Spirit of God, our discernment in these matters will be sharpened, and, as our commitment to the Lord deepens, we will become more willing to stand alone with the Lord against the onslaught of the *false prophets* and their numerous followers.

However, apostasy is something quite different. Let's take a moment to consider what it means to be an apostate. By definition, it is a "renunciation of a religious or political belief or allegiance."¹⁴ It is only reasonable to acknowledge that someone cannot renounce, or give up, a belief that he's never held; therefore, when we speak of someone being apostate, the understanding

¹³ Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁴ EnCarta Dictionary, "apostasy."

must be that he no longer adheres to the beliefs that he once held. It is equally evident that a person cannot forsake a belief for someone else; he may speak against that person's belief but he cannot give it up simply because it is not his own. When we speak of a denomination or a church being apostate, we are referring to it having generally shifted from being Biblically sound in its teaching, to a place where it no longer adheres to the doctrines of Scripture. Even though we might call such a group *apostate*, we must admit that that is only descriptive of its leadership when it abandoned the truth; if that occurred in the distant past, then everyone since (including its present leadership) have merely accepted the historical doctrinal position and carried on, which makes the group's present leaders and members *religious pagans*, and not apostates. When an individual becomes apostate, by definition he must turn his back on his Christian faith; he cannot be considered to be apostate unless he has first been truly born-again. Professing to be a Christian does not make anyone a born-again believer in Christ; therefore, if such a person (someone who only professes) forsakes "Christian" activities and departs into the world, then it follows that it is not correct to call them *apostate* – they are simply following the dictates of their sinful heart's natural, unredeemed condition.

Today there are probably very few denominations that have fallen into apostasy under their present leadership, and, consequently, we are in a situation where these groups are technically not apostate but, rather, fall into the category of being pagan professors of the Christian faith (they have never known the truth). There are even some denominations that have formed based upon false doctrine, and they have never departed from it – again, they are religious pagans. However, most denominations (and those who identify with them) have fallen into a pattern where they continue to hold to a form of Christianity; they might retain many of the familiar terms and traditions (although they frequently begin to redefine them) but no one will ever hear the saving truth of God's Word. People within these groups are often difficult to reach because they are convinced that they are spiritually okay – they have a firm faith in their *church* and remain largely ignorant of the Scriptures.

Apostasy from Christianity can take as many forms as there are individuals. There are some who will fall away into total wickedness, refusing to have anything to do with either Christians or Christianity. However, most will probably fall away into a religious life that is simply not in keeping with many of the doctrines of Scripture; they may still hold to a form of Christianity – some might even appear as they were before, but their fruits will begin to show their change of heart. They may hold to "a form of godliness" but, with the departure of the Spirit of God, it will become an increasingly thin veneer (2 Timothy 3:5); a "righteous" façade becomes very difficult to maintain with the passing of time. The challenge for the disciple of Jesus is to continually remain discerning so that he can hear the alarm of the Holy Spirit. The rest of Paul's counsel to Timothy clarifies our action toward such people: "from such turn away" (a present-tense command that contains the concept of separation).¹⁵

Ephesians 5:11 declares, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*." According to Jesus, we are to be fruit watchers: for "ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16), and so we must be observant of their words, attitudes, actions and associations. If the evidence of someone's life is not in keeping with the Word of God and the

¹⁵ Strong's Online.

Spirit of God (Who abides within us), then we are to have no part with them – spiritually speaking, we are to have no *fellowship* with them and must not join together with them.¹⁶ This places upon us the responsibility of knowing the Word of God sufficiently to be able to evaluate what we see, hear and read in its light. We must never seek spiritual fellowship with such a person and definitely not sit under their teaching; however, we are to expose (*reprove*) their error in an effort to bring them to repentance.

Today, if someone departs from godliness into godlessness, then it is commonly claimed that he was either never truly born-again, or that, even though he is living like the devil, at one time he prayed for salvation and so he will be okay in the end. The roots of the Calvinistic doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints* seem to have wound their way into Evangelicalism and find expression in their comparable doctrine of eternal security – simply put: once saved, always saved.¹⁷ However, we must not ignore the teachings of the Word of God on this matter. Jesus said, “But he that shall endure [remain faithful through trials] unto the end, the same [this is the one who] shall [will (*saved* is in the future tense)] be saved” (Matthew 24:13);¹⁸ what most don’t want to see in Jesus’ words is that if someone does not remain faithful to Him unto the end, then they will not be saved! To Nicodemus, Jesus said: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth [is believing (a continual reality; present tense)] in him **should not perish** [*perish* is in the subjunctive mood in the Greek, which means that it is not a certainty that the one who is believing will not perish], but have everlasting life” (John 3:16) – the *continual believing* must remain unto the end in order to be saved. The writer of Hebrews was even more forthright: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge] of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment [condemnation] and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27).¹⁹ These are only a small sampling of the many Scriptures that assure us that we must remain steadfast in the faith in order to be saved (see *Eternal Security* for a fuller development of this matter²⁰).

In reality, our response to those who have fallen into apostasy is to be the same as it is to the world – we are to separate from them. We may have a natural repulsion to being drawn into the world’s activities (that may be an easy separation); however, we must be particularly vigilant with those who are pagans or apostates and may still sound like a Christian. These are people who might use the same spiritual language, they may even openly profess to be Christians, and they might well be upstanding citizens, yet they only hold to a form of Christianity that has no foundation in God’s Word – we must avoid them. Amos 3:3 declares, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” – the rhetorical response is: “No!” John warns us to not be taken in by those who hold to doctrines that are contrary to the Word of God: “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” (2 John 10-11). Once again, we come back to the need to follow

¹⁶ Strong’s Online.

¹⁷ The difference between *perseverance of the saints* and *eternal security* is the role that God plays: for the Calvinist, God predetermines who is saved and so the saved cannot be lost – God chooses; for the Evangelical, once you have prayed for salvation you cannot be lost – you choose.

¹⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹ Strong’s Online.

²⁰ <https://www.thenarrowtruth.com/eternal-security.html>

the guidance of the Spirit of God and to exercise great discernment as we give heed to the fruits of their lives.

Too often it is very, very difficult to know the difference between someone who is apostate (he has been truly born-again, but has departed from the Lord) and the one who is merely disobedient (the next consideration). There is a line that is crossed from being disobedient to becoming apostate, and the difference may not always be evident to the outside observer.

2. SEPARATION FROM DISOBEDIENT BRETHREN AND ERROR

Within the doctrine of Biblical separation, this is an area where Evangelicals refuse to go, yet it is just as much a part of the teaching of Scripture as what we have already considered. What we find today is a wholesale capitulation to the drive for ecumenical unity. New Evangelicalism opened the door to dialogue with those who were apostate or pagan (in direct disobedience of Scripture's call to separate from them), and along with that came a general acceptance of all who merely profess Christianity. It is no longer popular to examine the doctrines of a group, or an individual, to determine if they are abiding by the truths of Scripture (even though we are commanded to do so – 1 John 4:1); not only is it unpopular, but in most cases it is considered to be a violation of "Christian love." Such compromise was made fashionable by Billy Graham and his Crusades, Bill Gothard's seminars, and the Promise Keepers, to name just three significant movements that have been used to unite professors of Christianity from all persuasions. Within these gatherings, those who are harboring error are never challenged with the truth of God's Word, and, too frequently, those who hold to the fundamental doctrines of Scripture begin to relax their own grip on the truth. The good apples in the barrel will never make the bad apple good, but you can rest assured that the bad apple will always leave its mark on the good apples in no time at all – "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9).

Paul included this in his first letter to the Corinthians: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company [associate] with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners [swindlers], or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company [associate], if **any man that is called a brother** [*called* is in the passive voice; others are calling this person a Christian] be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer [verbally abusive], or a drunkard, or an extortioner [swindler]; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away [remove] from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).²¹

This is someone who appears to be a Christian to some people but who does not exemplify a godly life – namely, holiness unto the Lord. The *angel* of Sardis had a reputation of being alive, yet Jesus said that he was lifeless (*dead*) and that without repentance, he would be lost (Revelation 3:1-3). Paul notes the one who is known as a Christian but whose life includes activities that are unchristian. Notice that not all of the enumerated actions are considered to be bad within the context of modern Evangelicalism: covetousness is often more graciously called God's blessing, idolatry is considered to be the drive that typifies someone who knows how to get things done (a

²¹ Friberg Lexicon.

workaholic), and fornication is too frequently ignored. Shacking up is becoming increasingly prevalent today and, if it is still frowned upon, then it is rarely dealt with. The normalizing of the LGBT life within our society is finding more than just a toe-hold within professing Christian groups, and one sociologist has even gone on record to say that, within the next 20-30 years, Evangelicals will embrace homosexuality.²² Paul says that such people (the covetous, idolater, etc.) are to be put away from among us or, more often the case, we must separate from them and those who condone their actions (since *we* will undoubtedly be in the minority).

Paul counselled Timothy: “If any man teach otherwise [teach something other than the truth], and consent [agree] not to wholesome [sound] words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud [has been blinded or demented], knowing nothing, but doting [having an unhealthy craving] about [concerning] questions [controversies] and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings [blasphemies], evil surmisings [conjectures], Perverse disputings [continual arguing] of men of corrupt [depraved] minds, and destitute [deprived] of the truth, supposing that gain [the process or means to gain] is godliness: from such withdraw thyself” (1 Timothy 6:3-5).²³

If there is someone who does not teach in accordance with the Lord Jesus and godliness, then he is teaching from his own base of knowledge, which stimulates pride (1 Corinthians 8:1) and will only lead to intellectual sparring and empty arguments. Once again, we must be sufficiently knowledgeable of the Scriptures so that we can use it as our Standard for all that we hear and read. Paul challenged Timothy in this very thing: “Study [make every effort (a command)] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing [correctly interpreting] the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).²⁴ We must be alert, for even teaching the truth plus something is not acceptable. The Jerusalem Jews brought such a gospel to the Galatians (the Gospel plus keeping some Mosaic traditions); the *something else* served to *pervert* the Gospel, and Paul commended those Jews to divine wrath (Galatians 1:7-8). Paul’s counsel to Timothy is to separate from those who teach that which is not in keeping with the Word of God.

Romans 16:17-18 – “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark [keep a watchful eye on] them which cause [are making] divisions and offences [temptations to sin] contrary to [*para* – alongside of] the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid [turn away from] them. For they that are such serve [*douleuo* – obey as a slave] not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly [desires]; and by good words [smooth speech] and fair speeches [flattery] deceive [are thoroughly deceiving] the hearts of the simple [innocent, naïve, unsuspecting].”²⁵

We are to identify those who teach or live *contrary to the doctrine* of the Scriptures and then *avoid them*. It is important that we understand exactly what we are being told here. *Contrary* comes from the Greek word *para*, which means to the side of, or alongside of.²⁶ We must be aware that the teaching spoken of here will not be diametrically opposed to the Scriptures; rather, it is *alongside of* the Scriptures. The purveyors of this type of teaching will not rail against the Word of God; they simply have a message that is not quite true to the Bible. We are to be constantly

²² <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/07/evangelicals-gay-marriage-108608>

²³ Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁵ Friberg Lexicon; Liddell-Scott Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

²⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

vigilant so that we are able to remain steadfast and grounded in the faith by the Spirit of God (Who abides within us) and the Law of God (written upon our hearts and minds). When Paul dealt with the error that was infesting the hearts of the Galatians, he spoke very clearly concerning what was taking place in their midst. The Jews from Judea were coming into the region of Galatia and teaching that salvation included **both** faith in Christ **and** keeping the traditions of the Jews (Acts 15:1, 5). They were not denying the necessity of faith in Christ (i.e., they were not contradicting the Gospel); they were simply adding the need to keep some of the Laws of Moses (the ordinances that had been done away with at the cross by Christ – Colossians 2:14). This was a gospel that was *alongside of* the true message given by God to Paul, and Paul warns: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other [*para* – an alongside of] gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). We must strive to thoroughly understand the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15) so that we will recognize the error that will come our way as being merely *alongside of* the truth, even while it is presented as being the truth of God. We can be grateful that when we place our faith in Christ, the Spirit of God comes to guide us into all truth (John 16:13); as we submit to the Spirit’s leading, our discernment will be sharpened so as to avoid the hook of the devil that remains a part of these *alongside of* gospels.

Understand this: it is those who present teachings that are *alongside of* the Scriptures who are responsible for causing the *divisions*. This *division* is not speaking of a separation between people; *alongside of* preaching seeks to introduce a rift between the hearer and the Word of God – if the hearer accepts the alongside-of-preacher’s words as being truth, then he has just placed an alongside-of-word ahead of God’s Truth. At that moment, the wedge of error has been inserted between that hearer and God’s Word, and that is the *division* that is being warned against. Nevertheless, if you hold to a Biblical position among Evangelicals (which means that you are not ecumenical), then you will be accused of being divisive – of causing division between “brothers.” The essence of Biblical separation requires that we not walk together with the ecumenist; we must put some distance between ourselves and error (no, they are not brothers). This Scripture assures us that it is the one who promotes wrong (false) doctrine who introduces separation from the truth of God’s Word to his listeners. Those who do so, by departing from the Scriptures, do not serve the Lord (despite what they might claim), but are self-serving; through eloquence, they will deceive those who are not alert – those who have no fear of evil from others (*simple*).²⁷ We are to identify these purveyors of false teaching, keep a wary eye on them and raise the warning for all who will hear.

However, these people not only cause a separation from the truth of God, but they also bring *offences*. *Offences* comes from a Greek word (*skandalon*) that is literally the trigger of a trap, but is used figuratively to speak of that which is an enticement or temptation to sin.²⁸ As we consider the *divisions* that are caused by those who do not teach the truth of Scripture, it becomes very apparent that their persuasive arguments to accept their *alongside-of* teachings as truth is, in fact, their enticement to sin. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me ...” (Matthew 12:30a); anyone teaching that which is not in keeping with the narrow truth of God’s Word is *against* the Lord and, therefore, to follow his instruction would be to depart into sin. As we can see, *divisions*

²⁷ Strong’s Online.

²⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

and *offences* work together in an effort to draw us away from the Scriptures and into theologies that are man-made and lifeless.

On a practical note, there is nothing that is more prevalent today than ecumenism, which is nothing more than the effort of some to bring all religions (and even faiths) together and focus on the commonalities. The lead in this movement has been taken by the Roman Pontiff who envisions all religions falling under his leadership. It is amazing to see even elderly Evangelicals being infected with the ecumenical virus and referring to the Roman Catholics as their “brothers in the Lord.” The late Billy Graham did much to break the barriers down between the Catholics and Evangelicals; from very early in his crusades, the Catholics were included in the pre-crusade coordination and all of those who came forward during the meetings were sent back to their own churches – including Catholics being encouraged to return to their own corrupt churches for follow-up! Anyone with even a modicum of discernment will recognize that Roman Catholic doctrine is far from Biblical – it has not been anywhere near the Truth (let alone *alongside of* it) for over 1500 years! Nevertheless, Evangelicals and Catholics are coming together in increasing numbers; Chuck Colson (Prison Fellowship), Bill Bright (Campus Crusade), Mark Noll (Wheaton College), Richard Mouw (Fuller Seminary), J.I. Packer (Regent College), Richard Land (Southern Baptist) and Rick Warren (Saddleback Church) are a few of the wide spectrum of Evangelical leaders who have taken deliberate steps to bridge the gap.

Biblical separation is definitely not a popular doctrine, yet it is clearly taught in the Scriptures and finds its roots in the holiness of God. We are instructed to “walk worthy of the vocation” to which we have been called (Ephesians 4:1); it is God Who has “saved us, and called *us* with an **holy calling**” (2 Timothy 1:9). Holiness, by its very essence, requires separation from everything that is not holy (as light is separate from darkness). God help us to step out in faith, adhering to the truths of the Scriptures more than the doctrines of men. This will be neither easy nor popular, but it is essential if we desire to walk in holiness according to the leading of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:3-4).