



Faith Pulpit

A Call for Separation

A few months ago I was speaking to an individual who had participated in a “Jesus March.” He spoke of how wonderful it was to have been there at the march. He said one could feel the “moving” of the Spirit and the overwhelming sense of love that permeated the event. Jesus was the common bond between all of those present. Doctrine was not an issue. The greatest blessing was when a Roman Catholic priest stood and prayed for the marchers. This man claimed to be a Christian. However, I found that his spiritual discernment was suspect. How could a true believer in Jesus receive a blessing from the prayer of one who denies some of the key tenants of the faith?

There are many professing believers, like this man, who cooperate with false teachers. This ought not to be! God calls us to separate from error (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1). How should a true believer respond to those who cooperate with unbelievers? Separation is the only response! Believers are not to cooperate with those who deny the fundamentals of the faith! If, however, a believer refuses to be obedient to God’s Word and continues in fellowship with false teachers, separation from that believer is the proper action.

Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, tells the church of Thessalonica what action is to be taken when another believer is walking in a disobedient manner, “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. “This is a direct command! Purity not compromise is the directive. The term “withdraw yourselves” denotes the idea of one gathering in a sail. It is written in a true middle voice to indicate that the believers in Thessalonica are, as a matter of their will, to gather or remove themselves from the disorderly. Compliance with God’s desire for purity requires the answering of three questions.

The first question is “from whom is one to separate?” Notice, Paul states, “withdraw yourselves from every brother. ...” The Greek word that is translated “from” indicates a moving away or separation from someone or something (Brooks & Winbery, p. 19). This moving away is from “every brother.” What does Paul mean when he uses the term “brother.” In understanding the meaning and use of words one should study how the word is used by the writer throughout the letter. In 2 Thessalonians, “brother” is a key word. Paul uses the word to indicate other believers. “Brother” is used in 2 Thessalonians 1:3 as brothers in the faith. 2 Thessalonians 2:1 speaks of the coming of the Lord and indicates that the brethren in Thessalonica were to be gathered to Christ when He comes. In 2 Thessalonians 2:23, Paul speaks of the brethren as being beloved by the Lord. It is clear that Paul is using the word “brother” to indicate true believers in Christ. The separation that is to take place is from another believer.

When is that separation to take place? There are some who want to separate over the color of the carpet. That is not the basis for true separation. Look at what Paul states in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, “withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.” The term “walketh” is a Greek idiom for one’s current behavior. It is the person’s manner of life. It is a present tense participle that indicates a continuous pattern. The word “disorderly” is a military term. It was used in relationship to an army that was marching out of step. Have you ever seen a marching band where one member was out of step? This can be humorous to watch, but it is deadly for a soldier in combat to have one of his comrades out of step. As soldiers of Christ, we are in a spiritual battle, and it is imperative for every believer to be in step with Christ.

A believer knows he is in step with Christ when he is obedient to the principles taught in the Bible. Notice what Paul says, “withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us.” “Tradition” is that form of teaching that the Apostle Paul had handed down to them (2 Thess. 2:15). In essence, it is the doctrines of the Christian Faith. Believers are to “stand fast and hold” the fundamental doctrines. It is impossible to stand fast and hold the faith while cooperating with those who deny the fundamentals of the faith. Paul wrote that those who were unruly or disorderly were to be warned or instructed (2 Thess. 5:14). Apparently those who were to be warned did not heed the instruction and, therefore, Paul instructed the church in Thessalonica to withdraw from these erring brothers. There are times when separation from other believers is necessary.

The questions have been raised and answered as to whom should one separate from and when that separation should take place, however, it is of the utmost importance to explain why separation should take place. Separation is not a matter of one’s own choosing. Separation is a matter of obedience to the commands of God. The individual spoken of previously who had attended the “Jesus March” said that doctrine should be put aside and believers should just love Jesus. How can one love Jesus without right doctrine? How can one love Jesus and be disobedient to His commands? Christ said that the one who

loves Him would obey His commandments! How then can a believer who professes to love Jesus cooperate with those who are disobedient concerning the Word of Christ? Does not corruption indicate an attitude of acceptance?

The Word of God commands separation. Observe the first Part of the verse, “Now we command you ...” Why is separation necessary? It is commanded by God! The term “command” indicates an order given as in the military when a superior officer hands down an order. It is a compound word. The first part of the word has the meaning of being alongside or beside. The second part of the word denotes an announcement. It is like a town crier that announces the edict of the king. He is passing along the proclamation. Paul’s command is that which he received from Christ (Galatians 1:16). Observe how Paul states his authority, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...” “In the name of” means that Paul has the authority of Jesus. Paul uses the full title for Jesus in order to demonstrate that the absolute authority which resides in Christ Himself is exercised by Paul to command separation from a believer who is disobedient to the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Separation is necessary for purity and for the stability of the Church. Consider 2 Thessalonians 2:15, the church in Thessalonica was exhorted by Paul to stand fast to the true doctrine which he taught. True doctrine cannot be maintained when believers collaborate with unbelievers! The way to maintain doctrinal purity is to withdraw oneself from apostasy and those who would cooperate with apostates. In this day of compromise and ecumenism, let the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ stand fast and hold the traditions which are taught in the Word of God.

Let every brother be mindful of the exhortation, “Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate. . .!”

Dennis Zuber

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