

## **SEPARATION: from whom, and why?** Responding to Doctrinal Error & Moral Sins.

Phil Myers & Randy Dirkes

Paul disassociated himself from unbelievers. That's the easy part. But from time to time he also denigrated other believers or disassociated himself from certain brothers. Was he right? What about forgiving others?

Identifying false doctrine is the easier part. That is, when others simply deny what the Scripture clearly teaches regarding fundamentals of the faith. However, when believers have a different philosophy of ministry, or emphasize certain doctrines beyond reason, or elevate a minor issue to an improper height, or twist Scripture; that is when it crosses our minds that we may not be right to cooperate with them at all.

Today, there seem to be infinite varieties of denominations, ministries, and organizations. No doubt about it, you and We [Phil & Randy] have already made decisions that we will not support certain others even though they are orthodox on the most important doctrines.

This article is designed to help you decide where you may already have drawn these lines of demarcation. We want to suggest a study which we believe will help you to resolve some of the capriciousness in this process.

Since so many people often make judgments and decisions on emotions rather than on biblical bases, it has become increasingly difficult for those who hold to conservative evangelicalism to know with whom we may have fellowship. The questions may go something like this:

- What Bible teachers and organizations may we support wholeheartedly?*
- With whom may we have fellowship?*
- With what believers are we forbidden to fellowship?*
- Are there clear biblical guidelines for breaking fellowship with another believer?*

If we extend this issue beyond the individual's situation, the problem is then in the area of church relationships. We believe there are two biblical guidelines. Seeing them may help you to determine how to resolve some of the following questions:

- *Whose books may you recommend?*
- *Whom may you invite as guest speakers to fill your church's pulpit*
- *What movements, organizations, and special interest groups may you endorse? [schools? publish. houses?]*
- *What denominations [or local churches] must you avoid?*
- *What mission boards may you stand behind even when you disagree with them strongly on certain issues?*
- *Against whom must you speak out vocally?*
- *Who may not join your church?*
- *Who may not hold office in your church?*
- *What people will you "seem to support" if you quote them frequently?*

The reason for this study is to help you sift through these issues, not to tell you what we believe about separation.

First, we will list and comment on all thirty-two [32] New Testament passages of Scripture which pertain to principles or examples of separation from other Christians.

Second, we will draw conclusions as to what criteria are used for separation.

Finally, we will suggest a chart which we've found helpful in weighing the importance of doctrine. This chart will help you to arrange issues according to the weight of your convictions.

## New Testament Verses on Separating from a Brother

You must refer to a **PRINCIPLE**  
or to an **EXAMPLE**  
explicitly expressed in Scripture  
before you refuse to fellowship with any believer.

### 1. Matthew 7.15-20

**PRINCIPLE:** beware of false prophets, those who claim to speak in God's name but teach false doctrine.

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 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. 21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

### 2. Matthew 18.17

**PRINCIPLE:** exercise separation only after following certain steps.

Mat 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.

### 3. Luke 17.3,4

**PRINCIPLE:** if a brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

### 4. Acts 15.36-41

**EXAMPLE:** Paul & Barnabas split up over the issue of John Mark's suitability for missionary service.

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; 40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

### 5. Romans 16.17,18

**PRINCIPLE:** mark those who cause divisions, hindrance or dissension, avoid them

17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

### 6. I Corinthians 1.11-13

**EXAMPLE:** brethren. . .there are contentions among you [Chloe said so] - schisms in the congregation

11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

### 7. I Corinthians 5.6-13

**PRINCIPLE** followed by **EXAMPLE:** exercise church discipline and excommunicate immoral person from the assembly.

6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the

covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 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. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

**RESULT:** II Cor 2.6,7, fellowship restored

2Co 2:6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

2Co 2:7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

#### 8. I Corinthians 15.33

**PRINCIPLE:** stay away from those who have bad morals

33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

#### 9. II Corinthians 6.14-18

**PRINCIPLE:** do not be bound together with unbelievers, come out from among them [leave their congregation?]

14 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.

#### 10. II Corinthians 11.12-15

**EXAMPLE:** church members [probably thought to be true believers at one time] causing divisions

12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. 13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

#### 11. Galatians 1.8,9

**PRINCIPLE:** curse on those who are teaching a false Gospel

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

#### 12. Galatians 2.11-14

**EXAMPLE:** Paul rebukes Peter publicly

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. 13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. 14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

#### 13. Galatians 6.1

**PRINCIPLE:** restore a sinning brother

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

#### 14. Ephesians 5.11

**PRINCIPLE:** do not participate in wickedness, but expose it

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

## 15. Philippians 3.17,18

**EXAMPLE:** mark them. . . they are enemies of the cross of Christ

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

## 16. II Thessalonians 3.6-15

**PRINCIPLE:** avoid Christians who are undisciplined and rebellious

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. 7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; 8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: 9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. 10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. 13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. 14 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. 15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

## 18. I Timothy 1.19,20

**EXAMPLE:** Hymenaeus & Alexander have made shipwreck of their lives. . . delivered unto Satan. . . learn not to blaspheme

19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: 20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

## 19. I Timothy 5.20

**PRINCIPLE:** publicly rebuke those who sin

20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

## 20. I Timothy 6.3-5

**PRINCIPLE:** don't argue over interpretations of the law, leave, and go away

3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

## 21. II Timothy 2.17,18

**EXAMPLE:** Hymenaeus & Philetus. . . babblings & ungodliness, a cancer

17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

## 22. II Timothy 3.1-5

**PRINCIPLE:** avoid this kind of man

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

## 23. II Timothy 4.2-4

**PRINCIPLE:** reprove, rebuke. . . itching ears

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

24. II Timothy 4.10

*EXAMPLE:* Demas turned back on Paul [also God?]

*by implication*—Crescens & Titus, too?

10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

25. II Timothy 4.14,15

*EXAMPLE:* Alexander. . .did me much harm. . .beware

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: 15 of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

26. Titus 3.9-11

*PRINCIPLE:* reject a factious man after the second warning

9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. 10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; 11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

27. James 5.20

*PRINCIPLE:* turn a sinner from his error

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

28. II John 10,11

*PRINCIPLE:* do not offer hospitality or friendship to false teachers

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

29. III John 9,10

*EXAMPLE:* Diotrephes. . .loves to have attention. . .malicious words

9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

31. The Revelation 2.4, etc.

*EXAMPLE:* I have something against you

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

30. The Revelation 3.19

*PRINCIPLE:* rebuke them because you love them

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

## TWO CRITERIA FOR SEPARATION

We conclude two things:

A. A believer cannot have fellowship with unbelievers in spiritual matters. The chart below will help in discerning who actually are unbelievers, especially pertaining to those who parade in religious garb.

B. A believer cannot divide fellowship with any other believer except for two reasons: 1) moral, 2) doctrinal.

Of these two areas, it is the doctrinal one that gives us conservative evangelicals the greatest problem. The remainder of this study will focus on that issue.

## DOCTRINES & TENETS

Here is a listing of 50+ topics and subtopics that are held in Christian circles, especially those which many feel may have bearing on separation issues. Some may be of little importance to you and of course, others may certainly be added. We have avoided putting them in any kind of order except alphabetical.

*Feel free to add any biblical matters at your own discretion.*

Church attendance, local, universal, membership  
 Creationism  
 Elders, deacons & Church polity  
 Election: by faith or by fiat  
 Eschatology: Rapture, second coming, Day of Lord, Great Day of the Lord, Millennium  
 Evangelism: necessity, responsibility, mode  
 Greek texts, authority thereof  
 Holy Spirit: indwelling, filling, sealing, teaching  
 Hermeneutic principles  
 Icons, statues  
 Idolatry  
 Jesus, deity, humanity, resurrection, virgin birth  
 Kingdom of Heaven, and Kingdom of God  
 Ordinances: baptism, communion  
 OT Law(s): moral, civil, ritual  
 Man: depravity, free will, responsibilities  
 Missions: necessity, scope  
 Music: lyrics, rhythm, beat  
 Ordination: mode, purpose, expectations  
 Remarriage after divorce  
 Responsibility to: government, individual, church  
 Rewards: when, where, loss of rewards  
 Salvation: by faith alone apart from works  
 Salvation: "lordship," election, security of the believer  
 Sanctification: worldliness, habits, taboos, good works  
 Scripture: inspiration, inerrancy, authority, verbal, plenary  
 Separation  
 Spiritual gifts: temporary? more than one? Where's the list? Others?  
 Theology: Dispensational, Covenant, Reformed  
 Tithing or generosity?  
 Trinity

## DETERMINING DOCTRINAL WEIGHT

The greatest difficulty, in our perspective, bears on how much importance we place on an individual doctrine. All biblical teachings do not carry the same weight. All Scripture is equally inspired by God, but some tenets are more crucial.

ESSENTIALS	MAJORS	MINORS	OPINIONS

Sort the list doctrines on the previous page into these 4 above categories

**ESSENTIALS:** *[probably a pretty short list]*, often called the Fundamentals  
no one can deny these fundamentals and be saved. You'd take a bullet rather than recant.  
*By the by, in my opinion, it is not necessary for a small child to affirm all of these to be saved.*

**MAJORS:** extremely important, absolutely  
required for victorious living, godliness, rightly dividing the Word, deviation here may be cause for not working with other believers,

**MINORS:** many sound churches may not agree  
Here; disagreement does not disqualify for membership, never a cause to refuse to work with another church

**OPINIONS:** truths you wish had been expressed so clearly in Scripture that no one could be confused.

You may be surprised at how few items fit under the ESSENTIAL column. We writers found seven.

1. Trinity
2. Jesus Christ, humanity & deity
3. Bodily resurrection of Christ
4. Salvation, faith alone
5. Scriptures, inspiration & authority
6. Virgin birth
7. Depravity of man

Your list might be somewhat different than our above list, but we are guessing that it will probably not vary too much. Variance in MAJOR DOCTRINES would indicate that another believer probably "reads" Scripture with another lens. His hermeneutical principles are different than yours. You consider him to be seriously mistaken and incorrect in how he interprets the Bible.

We both *[Randy & Phil]* hold many of our MINOR and OPINION doctrines very dear, but wouldn't go before a firing squad if asked to renounce them. You, of course, are welcome to hold strong beliefs in all "your" doctrine, but if you differ with others in a MINOR category, you will just have to live with the fact that other godly men understand it differently.

For instance, both of us have definite belief about the mode of baptism—single immersion. But we admit there are holy men who sprinkle, pour, and dip believers thrice. We readily admit that Scripture does not state whether John the Baptizer put Jesus under the water once, twice, or thrice.

Mode may vary. So we both place mode under opinion. But the issue of baptismal regeneration would fall in both our lists under MAJOR because it is contrary to clear teaching on regeneration solely by faith. Now, if you practice infant baptism, how would you define it: as a sacrament or a symbol? Then where would you place it on your chart?

We feel there should be a lot of clear Scripture on any teaching placed in the MAJOR column. Some of my *[pjm]* OPINIONS only have a verse or two, and are not terribly clear at that. However, I affirm that I believe the Scripture teaches it as truth.

Where would you put the Day of the Lord? And how exactly does it differ [chapter and verse, please] with the Great Day of the Lord? When do they begin and end, precisely?

## FOUR IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 1) If a generally reliable friend disagrees on a major area, do you automatically consider him "in the bond of iniquity," or simply mistaken, or is it that he has hardened himself and will not consider the opposing positions?
- 2) Sit down with the best mind you know who will help you think through your evaluation, after all, "iron sharpens iron." *Prov 27.17* Just as the file hones the axe, another viewpoint may help you to process the Scriptures objectively from another stance.
- 3) If your list of MAJORS is pretty long, we believe you have a propensity for placing too much weight on debatable matters. Just because you have done an enormous amount of study on a particular subject doesn't automatically mean it is a highly significant subject.
- 4) Recheck your research. For every item you place as a MAJOR doctrine, many Scripture portions should be abundantly clear that this warrants separation from other believers who disagree. Look at the topic from others' eyes. Is there a specific warning in the Bible, or is there an actual example in the Bible where brothers parted ways.

We believe that different viewpoints in the MINOR group will not mandate separation. Church history is replete with individuals and churches which have split over minor issues. The outsider has no difficulty seeing the myopic views of the contenders, but those involved often had their pride or intellectual integrity at stake. Contentiousness is an affront to the Church [*I Corinthians 3.16,17*].

## CONCLUSIONS & CAUTIONS

- 1) Paul never advocated that believers leave the Corinthian church even though there were many [14?] serious moral faults.
- 2) Peter was rebuked by Paul for his error but not ostracized or put out of the church.
- 3) "The contention was so sharp" in Antioch that Paul and Barnabas parted company. Most scholars regard this as a separation based on personality and preference rather than on doctrinal grounds. As such, it is an unfortunate occurrence; many feel that Paul later saw it as such because later he wrote, "Pick up Mark. . .for he is useful to me for service." II Timothy 4.1 Thus we have to be careful that separation is not based on contentious ground. *Prov 13.10* I believe [pjm] that neither man sinned.

Ten minutes after we get to heaven the Lord is going to have a Bible Doctrine class on Cloud Nine to answer all of our questions. We're all going to be taking notes. If He gives a test right away, everybody will have a lot of red marks when we get it back.

Beware of the pride of doctrinal discernment. A contemporary of Donald Gray Barnhouse once quipped, "I wish I were as sure of any doctrine as Donald Gray Barnhouse is sure of every doctrine." Another once intentionally misquoted Scripture as he remarked, "Now abideth faith, hope, and clarity, but the greatest of these is clarity."

**Always use discernment with charity.** Amen.

Someone suggested to us that a fifth column be used. This would include only the issue of salvation and the minimum content that a person must believe in order to be saved.



## MINIMUM CONTENT FOR SALVATION

One of us writers was saved at the age of five and there were a great number of things which he did not comprehend. However, we both believe that as soulwinners we cannot require a godless adult to be saved any differently than a child, and that is by simple trust in Jesus Christ's death.

1. Any child or adult must recognize that **God is perfect** and people aren't.
2. The issue is sin. A child must understand the concept that it is **right to be punished** for being bad.
3. **Depending on being good** does not pay the penalty for being bad.
4. Another issue is that **Jesus took our punishment** because He loves us. This happened when He died on the Cross.
5. He must understand that **God has made a \*promise that anyone who believes** that Jesus died in his or her place receives forgiveness for sin and a home in heaven.

\* This simple promise is given to small children or hardened criminals.

These two verses explain eternal life very clearly.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son [Jesus] that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.* John 3.16

*For by grace are ye saved through faith through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.* Ephesians 2.8,9

Philip J. Myers, PhD  
Randy Dirkes, ThM

Business partners as well as classmates at Dallas Theological Seminary

c. 1985, [rev 2020]