

Withdrawal from counterfeit Christianity is not the only application of this doctrine. Separation from disobedient brethren is also a Biblical imperative! It is precisely at this point that many believers turn away from the plain teaching of God's Word and substitute their own reasoning. Today, there are many disobedient brethren — men who refuse to separate from false teachers and apostate affiliations. These individuals are plainly disobedient to the Word of God. For them, the desire of visible unity, respectability, popularity, success or avoidance of schism takes precedence over simple obedience to the Bible. They may even seek to justify their disobedience on the basis of love or opportunities to witness. But it is still disobedience — and God says we are not to walk with disobedient brethren. We are to separate from them. II Thessalonians 3:6,14-15. Brethren, such as those found in the NAE, may say many commendable things. They may do many commendable things. But these things do not change the fact of their disobedience. Refusal to obey the Biblical doctrine of separation is sin, whether it involves failure to separate from a false teacher or a disobedient brother. There cannot be Scriptural unity where there is no agreement on truth. Amos 3:3.

Romans 16:17 commands us to “mark them (point them out) which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and AVOID them.” The fundamentalist (who, by definition, is one who practices Biblical separation) is not the one who causes division among believers. Division is caused by the brother who does not practice sound doctrine (the doctrine of separation is no exception) and the fundamentalist is required to separate from him. The fundamentalist is not trying to be unloving, schismatic or exclusive. He is simply desiring to be obedient to the Lord and His Word above all else!

There are at least four reasons why separation from disobedient brethren is required by God. First, this type of discipline is necessary in the local church fellowship in order to maintain church purity. I Corinthians 5 presents a case in point. The Church is charged “not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother (whether he is saved or not is not the issue — he bears the name Christian) be a fornicator, or covetous . . . with such an one no not to eat.” (verse 11). The individual spoken of here is disciplined by the Church and no longer permitted to fellowship in the ongoing ministry of the local assembly. If sin is allowed to remain unconfessed and unforsaken in the Christian fellowship, that sin will spread to others like leaven in bread (verses 5-7). God has ordained separation to stem the leavening effect of sin in compromised fellowships.

Second, separation from disobedient brethren is for the spiritual well-being of that brother. Unless the standard of God's Word is raised before the erring brother, he may continue in his sin unrebuked. II Thessalonians 3:6 commands, “withdraw your-

selves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye have received of us.” The context reveals that laziness (verse 11) is not the only basis for being disobedient. Any believer who is unfaithful to “the tradition” (all the Scripture that was given to the Church) was also considered to be disobedient (cf. 2:15). Disobedience to the Word of God is the determining factor. Separation will have the effect of making that brother or sister ashamed (3:14). They are not an enemy, nor should they be treated as such. They are erring brothers and sisters (3:15) and the desired object of separation is repentance and restitution to full fellowship with the brethren. This should be the attitude of every fundamentalist — a loving desire to raise a Biblical standard by way of separation so that the erring brother will realize his disobedience, repent and return to right fellowship.

The third reason for practicing separation is the desire for a “full reward” (II John 8) at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer is “not crowned (rewarded) except he strive lawfully” (II Timothy 2:5). It will be possible for a Christian to lose a reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ because of compromised fellowship, either directly or by identification (II John 10,11). Make no mistake about it — when a believer is identified with any religious activity which is not true to the Word, he will receive the disapproval of God as well. God is a jealous God. He wants all of us for Himself! He will not allow us to be identified, even in the slightest, with compromise or error because such double-mindedness would prevent our fellowship with Him (I Corinthians 10:16-22). Therefore, the support of a mass campaign to reach lost souls may seem most noble. But if disobedient new evangelical brethren are in the endeavor, the results will not justify the compromised fellowship. God will never suspend the requirements of separation in order to accomplish any worthwhile cause — even evangelism. That is simply not the way God works. He always leads according to the Book.

Finally, separation from disobedient brethren is necessary in order to maintain a strong, consistent testimony in the midst of theological turmoil and confusion. Compromised fellowship clouds the issues, dulls the spiritual discernment and silences scriptural proof. “Be not deceived, evil communications (wrong fellowships) corrupt good manners (right conduct)” (I Corinthians 15:33). Only then can he sound a faithful warning concerning the deception Satan is sowing in the church today (Acts 20:28-31). Always remember that our God is Holy — and He calls us to be the same! In order to be obedient to this command, we must endeavor, by the grace of God, to be separated wholly unto Him, regardless of the cost! C. H. Spurgeon said, “That I might not stultify my testimony, I have cut myself clear of those who err from the faith, and even from those who associate with them.”