What

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Do?

by G. I. Williamson
I. FROM WHAT SHALL WE SEPARATE?

We must begin by saying that the Bible does not teach believers to have absolutely no association with unbelievers. Some have held this view. But they have taught that believers should be entirely removed from all contact with unbelievers. This is not separation, but segregation. Paul spake against this doctrine when he said, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners or with idlers; for then must ye needs go out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:7, 10). Our Lord did not command his disciples to go out of the world so that they could be alone. Rather did he command his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). We are to be in the world, but not of the world. We are to separate from sinners, but not from sinners. It is not a sin to associate with unbelievers, but it is a sin to receive the doctrines of unbelievers. The unbelief of others does not mean we have to change our own beliefs. It is not possible to separate from all unbelievers. The Bible teaches us to separate from unbelievers who have become ungodly, but not from unbelievers who still have some good qualities. This is why the Bible speaks of separation from “unbelievers” but not from unbelievers who have become ungodly. This is why the Bible speaks of separation from “unbelievers” but not from unbelievers who have become ungodly. This is why the Bible speaks of separation from “unbelievers” but not from unbelievers who have become ungodly.

Having said this, however, we must also recognize that separation from a particular Church is not a matter that can be taken lightly. It is a matter of right action in a righteous manner. “That the soul be without knowledge, is not good; and he that hathest with his feet sin, shall be reckoned as one separate from unbelievers, but not without a clear knowledge of what the Bible means by separation, and of the proper manner of effecting it. We must prove all things, and then hold fast that which is good.” (2 Thess. 3:6, 21). Let us therefore consider the following questions.

II. HOW SHALL WE SEPARATE?

The second matter for careful consideration must now be dealt with. For it is evident that many people come to realize that they must separate from co-operation with unbelievers, who yet fail to separate in a scriptural manner.

One of the most common, unscriptural methods of separation from unbelievers, is what we might call secret separation. It is also called inner separation. It is the view which would allow one to remain outwardsly, and officially, a member of a Church, denomination, or Council, in which unbelievers prevail, while yet personally, inwardly, secretly disavowing and denying all that the Bible teaches, and in her life bearing the cross of Christ in a manner that is contrary to the will of God. A Church may faithfully preach the gospel in every single pulpit, and yet unbelievers may creep in. The Church may not have joined any organization or enterprise which can be avoided. But the Church may have entered into a co-operation with unbelievers in that which advances error and unbelief. It is this co-operation with unbelievers in that which advances error and unbelief, which the Bible teaches us to avoid. It is this co-operation with unbelievers in that which advances error and unbelief, which the Bible teaches us to avoid. It is this co-operation with unbelievers in that which advances error and unbelief, which the Bible teaches us to avoid. It is this co-operation with unbelievers in that which advances error and unbelief, which the Bible teaches us to avoid.

It should be obvious, from what has just been said, that the question of separation cannot be looked at only in terms of one’s own local congregation. For just as the local congregation must be judged as a whole, so must the denomination (and larger groups such as the World Council). If our own congregation is a part of a denomination in which many ministers are unfaithful to the Bible, in which teaching schools teach error, and denominational literature is unsound, then the duty to separate is quite as important. If the local congregation itself were unfaithful. Even if our particular minister believes the Bible the duty is not altered in the least. And the reason is that the situation envisioned still involves co-operation with unbelieving denominations, which can be avoided only by separation from the denomination. Christ forbids us to bear the unequal yoke with unbelievers, whether it be in our local congregation or the denomination of which it is a part. Yet, he forbids it even if we find ourselves in a denomination yoked with unbelieving denominations in the World Council of Churches.

The proper question that such sincere believers are forced to ask, “What shall I do in view of the fact that my Church is a part of this unbelieving movement?”

In one sense, of course, the answer is quite simple. For the evil thing about the World Council of Churches is that it unrightfully yokes together those who do and those who do not believe the doctrines of the Bible. And the Bible says, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” It says, “Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” (2 Cor. 6:14-18). And, make no mistake about it, these words cannot be set aside by vain arguments and excuses of men. These are the very words of God. They apply to every believer in every age and place. No believer can disregard them. They have taught that believers should be entirely removed from all contact with unbelievers. This is not separation, but segregation. Paul spake against this doctrine when he said, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners or with idlers; for then must ye needs go out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:7, 10). Our Lord did not command his disciples to go out of the world so that they could be alone. Rather did he command his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). We are to be in the world, but not of the world. We are to separate from sinners, but not from sinners. It is not a sin to associate with unbelievers, but it is a sin to receive the doctrines of unbelievers. The unbelief of others does not mean we have to change our own beliefs. It is not possible to separate from all unbelievers. The Bible teaches us to separate from unbelievers who have become ungodly, but not from unbelievers who still have some good qualities. This is why the Bible speaks of separation from “unbelievers” but not from unbelievers who have become ungodly. This is why the Bible speaks of separation from “unbelievers” but not from unbelievers who have become ungodly. This is why the Bible speaks of separation from “unbelievers” but not from unbelievers who have become ungodly. This is why the Bible speaks of separation from “unbelievers” but not from unbelievers who have become ungodly.

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confess them before men. If I am a Presbyterian, and the Presbyterian denomination is teaching false doctrine in various pulpits, in the seminary, and in Church literature, then I cooperate in this by simply being a Presbyterian. When "one member suffer(s), all the members suffer with it" (I Cor. 12:26). We cannot abstract ourselves from the corporate responsibility which belongs to us as members of a corporate body. That is why the Lord commands, not secret, but open and public separation from unbelief.

Another kind of separation that cannot be sanctioned is what we may call silent separation. This is not as great an evil as secret separation. But it cannot be condoned. By silent separation we mean the act of leaving a corrupt Church without witness or protest! And it goes without saying that it is much easier to remain silent than to witness against unbelief. But the Bible says, "How can fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). Unpleasant as it may be, a believer ought not to leave a Church in which unbelief flourishes, without first protesting against the apostasy. "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord," says Paul, "but be thou partaker of the affliction of the gospel according to the power of God." (II Tim. 1:8). There are two important reasons for doing so: (1) First, as Christians we ought to act openly, and courageously before men. This belongs to our heritage as Protestants. Our Protestant fathers spoke out, first of all, because of their devotion to the pen. It may be that our protest will avail nothing, our own particular denomination. In such a case, the act of leaving a corrupt Church without witness or protest will only stir the glory and honour of God and His truth.

There are two important reasons for doing so. (1) It may be that our protest against unbelief will set in motion a reformation movement whereby others "join with us in casting off the unequal yoke." This is not so unlikely as we may think. As a matter of fact, it has happened within our own day. It happened in the Baptist Union of Scotland. Christians in that denomination became convinced that the World Council of Churches was dominated by unbelief. It was realized that membership in the World Council of Churches involved co-operation with error and unbelief. Baptist believers became aroused and protested, but it was not necessary for them to leave the Baptist Union because the whole Baptist Union became aroused and voted to withdraw from the World Council of Churches. God mightily blessed the faithful protest of some so that the Baptist Union was delivered from fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and has not yet re-entered. (2) Of course this does not always happen. It may be that our protest against unbelief will only stir up a greater manifestation of unbelief and opposition to the truth. This is usually what happens when unbelief has become widespread in our own particular denomination. In such a case we will find ourselves excluded (like Luther) by the will of unbelievers. Protest against unbelief will not be tolerated where unbelief has become entrenched.

Proper separation from unbelief, then, is by way of open protest. It is an act of unashamed obedience to God and His Word, in which His truth is vindicated against those who have disregarded it. It is neither secret nor silent; it is both public and vocal. We not only separate from a Church in which unbelief is reigning, but we clearly state before the officers and members of the church the reasons for our separation. Then shall we be disciples of the one who said, "I spake openly to the world... and in secret have I said nothing." (John 18:20).

III. WHEN SHALL WE SEPARATE?

Our last question may seem the most difficult. But, strange as it may seem, if the first two questions are answered faithfully according to scripture, we believe that this last question will answer itself. This is so, because one of two things is bound to happen when we have answered the first two questions faithfully.

(1) It may be that our protest against unbelief will set in motion a reformation movement whereby others "join with us in casting off the unequal yoke." This is not so unlikely as we may think. As a matter of fact, it has happened within our own day. It happened in the Baptist Union of Scotland. Christians in that denomination became convinced that the World Council of Churches was dominated by unbelief. It was realized that membership in the World Council of Churches involved co-operation with error and unbelief. Baptist believers became aroused and protested, but it was not necessary for them to leave the Baptist Union because the whole Baptist Union became aroused and voted to withdraw from the World Council of Churches. God mightily blessed the faithful protest of some so that the Baptist Union was delivered from fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and has not yet re-entered. (2) Of course this does not always happen. It may be that our protest against unbelief will only stir up a greater manifestation of unbelief and opposition to the truth. This is usually what happens when unbelief has become widespread in our own particular denomination. In such a case we will find ourselves excluded (like Luther) by the will of unbelievers. Protest against unbelief will not be tolerated where unbelief has become entrenched.

In either case it may be some time before the outcome is certain. We cannot predict, in any general way, when separation may become necessary. But the time will make itself clear on the basis of this simple principle: If we last separate, when there is no alternative—we must separate. When there is no further means of getting rid of the unequal yoke, if our protest is to be of any avail, then we can do nothing else: we must separate. When we have faithfully protested, we will thus find the issue (and the time) settled for us. And so the really important matter is this: the time to press for separation is now. There is never any justification for inaction when we once discover that we are involved in co-operation with unbelief. Provided we are certain of this evil, we must act at once. We must begin immediately to protest to demand that our Church rid itself of the unequal yoke. And we must press the issue until it is settled. Circumstances do not determine duty, rather duty determines circumstances. The great evil of our day is that many believers know very well that they are yoked together with unbelief, and yet they wait for a more convenient season to force a separation between the two. This is tragic because unbelief will never force the issue. It is to the advantage of unbelief if it is able to work in co-operation with compromising believers. God knows this. His command is therefore not to wait for a more convenient season, but to simply separate from fellowship with unbelief. And this means that the time to make the protest which will force the issue is now.

It is, as we stated at the beginning, our conviction that membership in a Church (or denomination) which belongs to the World Council of Churches (or the National Council of Churches, which is similar to it) bears the unequal yoke. For any who may be in doubt we would suggest a careful study of this organization. But the message of this tract is primarily for those who already know the facts, and have wondered what they ought to do. We have spoken because the scripture speaks. We call upon you to begin now, where you are, to renounce the evil yoke of co-operation with unbelievers. Hard as this task may be, it is little enough to do for our Lord.

A final word: perhaps you are a member of a Church that is not under the unequal yoke. If so, you too have a responsibility. However much we may disapprove of other believers who yet co-operate with unbelievers, we still have a responsibility to them. It is our responsibility to warn them against the unequal yoke, and encourage them to cast it off. Part of the problem is that we have not been sufficiently concerned. (May we invite you, therefore, to speak to others and to pass along to them such tracts as this in order that they may be warned and encouraged).