

THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL SEPARATION AS IT RELATES
TO THE DOCTRINAL ERROR OF A BELIEVER

by

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DOCTRINAL ERROR OF A BELIEVER
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There is much disagreement regarding separation from another believer over doctrinal matters. It is the writer's thesis that the Bible does teach separation from other believers if there is deviation from sound doctrine. Scriptural principles of separation are established from three passages: Galatians 1:6-9, 2:11-14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; and Romans 16:17-18.

Inclusivism and separatism are two opposing positions on separation. Inclusivism holds that persons of contrary theological viewpoints should cooperate in the work of the Lord. Its tenets are visible unity of the church, emphasis on social concern, openness to contrary viewpoints, and repudiation of the practice of separation. The tenets that distinguish separatism are the priority of doctrine, the doctrinal purity of the visible church, and the practice of ecclesiastical separation.

The example of the Galatian churches demonstrates the grave consequences of compromising the gospel. The believers in Galatia wavered between the doctrinal position of the apostate Judaizers and that of the apostles. Paul denounced the believers for their deviation from sound doctrine and sought their restoration. The confrontation of Peter by Paul illustrates that the significance of his inconsistent action was tantamount to deviation from the truth.

The exhortation of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 is withdrawal from disobedient believers. That this passage contains a general principle of separation is indicated by the scope of the terms and the structure of the passage. It deals with separation from believers who carry on a life of insubordination to the Word of God. Separation is implemented by removing oneself from contact with the insubordinate brother. It is motivated by concern for his restoration.

The emphasis of Romans 16:17-18 is turning away from dissensions over sound doctrine. This applies to any within a church including believers who cause divisions. The church must be on guard against those whose beliefs are not in total alignment with Scripture and turn from them in order to maintain the unity of the teaching of Scripture.

It is concluded that the Bible teaches separation from other believers who deviate from sound doctrine, disobey the Word of God, or who produce divisions contrary to sound doctrine. It is necessary to have discernment of these believers and avoid them by turning away from them.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
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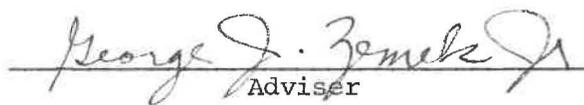

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAG	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <u>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</u>
BSac	<u>Bibliotheca Sacra</u>
GTJ	<u>Grace Theological Journal</u>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	C. Brown (ed.), <u>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</u>
NTS	<u>New Testament Studies</u>
TDNT	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of separation is taught by precept and by example in the Bible. The presence of sin in the world requires separation because God in His holiness cannot tolerate sin. The Biblical data regarding separation can be classified according to the various occasions demanding separation.¹

It is proper that believers show an active concern for the truth by a determined defense of the true Christian position as understood by the apostolic church. This body of truth is "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), and "the standard of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13). The very character of this body of truth requires the exposure of falsehood, and at times, separation from the source of error. Furthermore, deviation from the Word of God by true believers presents a major obstacle to a continuing and effective ministry for the Lord.

Whether or not to separate from another believer over doctrinal matters has caused much discussion and disagreement and even denunciation. The central issue is whether the Bible teaches separation from other believers who deviate from sound doctrine and associate with false teachers who depreciate the Word of God.

The controversy arises because of a major cleavage among conservative theologians. There is agreement on basic Biblical doctrines, but

¹See Baker's Dictionary of Theology, s.v. "Separation," by E. F. Harrison, p. 408, for a list of ten areas of separation. Note, however, the omission of separation from immoral believers and from false doctrine.

disagreement comes over associations and separation. Scripture passages presented to advocate separation are ignored or explained away by non-separatists. Separatists are charged with misapplying verses by ignoring the context. Some passages dealing with one facet of separation are used by the separatist to teach another facet.

This thesis will be devoted to the topic of separation from other believers for doctrinal reasons. It is the writer's thesis that the Bible does teach separation from other believers if there is deviation from sound doctrine. The matters of personal separation and church discipline are not within the scope of this consideration.

The goal of this thesis is to reach valid conclusions based on the exegesis of Scripture. The procedure will be as follows. Chapter one will bring into focus the two opposing positions on separation now prevailing in the contemporary conservative spectrum. Chapter two will deal with the arguments for separation from the example of Galatians. Chapter three will deal with the command in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 to withdraw from disobedient believers. Chapter four will deal with the exhortation in Romans 16:17-18 to turn away from dissension. Chapter five will formulate the principles of separation as derived from the passages considered.

The terms "second degree" and "secondary separation" will not be used because they connote a doctrine that is derived from another doctrine. It is maintained that the topic under consideration is a distinct doctrine that stands alongside of, and not in subordination to, the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation from unbelievers.

The purpose of this thesis is to establish principles of separation based on the scriptural data, rather than to name names or evaluate

individuals or movements. Further, the intent is to advocate separation, not schism. Schism is rending the body of Christ for no Biblical reason. A spirit of love and concern for other believers and evangelistic zeal for the unsaved must be underlying factors in any discussion of Biblical separation.

CHAPTER I

THE TENETS OF INCLUSIVISM AND OF SEPARATISM

The conflict between the inclusivist and separatist positions naturally arises out of their diverse tenets and priorities. A survey of their respective tenets needs to be considered in order to study adequately the scriptural principles of this area of Biblical separation.

The Tenets of Inclusivism

"Inclusivism is the concept that persons of contrary theological viewpoints can and should cooperate in the work of the Lord."¹ Its use includes the liberal ecumenical emphasis and also the association between liberal and conservative theological positions. It is applied to ecumenical evangelism and the growing movement of evangelical ecumenism.² Within the scope of this thesis inclusivist will mean the non-separatist, evangelical ecumenist position.

The term "evangelical" is used to denote a variety of conservative theological positions. Three basic beliefs characterize evangelicals in general: 1) the authority of the Bible, 2) personal faith in

¹Ernest Pickering, Biblical Separation: The Struggle for a Pure Church (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1979), p. 153.

²See George W. Dollar, A History of Fundamentalism in America (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), pp. 279, 382; and Richard F. Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), pp. 312-13.

Christ for salvation, and 3) an urgency of seeking the conversion of the unsaved.¹

The broad range of evangelical subdivisions make their categorization difficult. As many as fourteen groups are listed by Webber.² Four general classifications are suggested by Quebedeaux. These include 1) separatist fundamentalism 2) open fundamentalism 3) establishment evangelicalism, and 4) new evangelicalism.³ The latter group is also referred to as the young evangelicals. Two other significant groups use the term evangelical. They are the evangelical Catholics, and the charismatics.⁴

Carl F. H. Henry unmasks the evangelical image of unity posited by the younger leaders in his book, Evangelicals in Search of Identity.⁵ However, the inclusivist policy is the issue that divides the broad range of evangelicalism into separatists and non-separatists. It is also the unifying factor of the various non-separatist subdivisions.

¹John D. Woodbridge, Mark A. Noll, and Nathan O. Hatch, The Gospel in America (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 14-15; Richard Quebedeaux, The Young Evangelicals (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 4; Robert K. Johnston, Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 3; and Baker's Dictionary of Theology, s.v. "Evangelical," by Loraine Boettner, p. 200.

²Robert E. Webber, Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 32-33.

³Quebedeaux, Young Evangelicals, pp. 18-41.

⁴See Michael Harper, Three Sisters (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 25; Paul W. Witte, On Common Ground (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1975), p. 11; Webber, Common Roots, p. 19; and Richard Quebedeaux, The New Charismatics (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), p. 127.

⁵(Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976).

The tenets of inclusivism apply in varying degrees to the non-separatists.

Visible Unity of the Church

The foundational tenet of inclusivism is the unity of professing believers. Love is to be the outstanding mark of the true disciple. This is emphasized to the minimizing of doctrine.¹ Unity is to be the result of love.

While the spiritual unity of true believers in Christ is recognized, it is not to be the sole expression of unity.² The unity of the visible church becomes the goal of inclusivism. Like the liberal ecumenical movement, evangelical ecumenism stresses the application of John 17:21-23 to the visible church.³

Webber calls for the restoration of the historic marks of the church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. "The oneness of the church points not only to the unity we have with Christ Jesus, but also to the unity we have with all believers, by whatever name they are called-- Roman Catholic, orthodox, ecumenical, or evangelical."⁴ To recover catholicity, he designates two steps that evangelicals should take.

¹Edward J. Carnell, The Case for Orthodox Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 128.

²Webber, Common Roots, pp. 45-46.

³Carnell, Case for Orthodox Theology, p. 129; Millard Erickson, The New Evangelical Theology (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1968), pp. 192-93; Webber, Common Roots, pp. 55-56; and others.

⁴Webber, Common Roots, p. 70; see chapter 4, "The Historic 'Marks' of the Church," pp. 55-71.

The first is to establish unity and catholicity among evangelicals. . . .

The second step is to enter into dialogue with Roman Catholics, orthodox, and ecumenical Christians.¹

Unity is also stressed by the charismatic segment of those who hold to the inclusivist position. The foundation of the unity in charismatic renewal theology is the alleged baptism of the Holy Spirit. This supercedes close doctrinal agreement for unity because it preceded the teaching of doctrine in the book of Acts.² In this way unity is brought about in spite of historic denominational and theological divisions.

The priority of unity leads to a strong emphasis on cooperation in areas of ministry. Evangelicals have sought the aid of apostates in their goal of getting more souls saved. Thus, cooperative evangelism and ecumenical missions have been visible indications of inclusivism.

Emphasis on Social Concern

Another tenet of inclusivism is social concern. This priority has developed from Henry's initial discussion of it in The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism to the point of the eclipsing of true evangelism by social action. Henry wrote to criticize the lack of concern and involvement in social needs by fundamentalists. He asserted that while they had a valid message, they were not giving it a proper temporal focus.³

Henry maintained, however, that the primary aim is not that of building better civilizations, but of proclaiming the gospel of

¹Ibid., pp. 64-65.

²Quebedeaux, New Charismatics, p. 123.

³(Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), p. 65.

redeeming grace.¹ Ockenga likewise emphasized social concern. He stated, "There need be no dichotomy between the personal gospel and the social gospel."²

While earlier leaders professed strong social concern, "young evangelicals" are demanding even more emphasis in this area. Evangelism must reach the whole person; ". . . conversion, discipleship, and social concern are inextricably linked together. . . ."³ This great emphasis has overbalanced the issue to that of social change being the primary role of the church.⁴ The Chicago Declaration, and the Chicago Call reflect the overriding stress on social concern.⁵

Further, an analysis of the recent writings of John R. W. Stott reveals his "burning desire to wed evangelicalism and social action as equal in importance."⁶ But in the end, "it is impossible to evade the impression that the present burden of John R. W. Stott is more social than evangelistic."⁷

¹Ibid., p. 85.

²Harold J. Ockenga, "News Release," December 8, 1957.

³Quebedeaux, Young Evangelicals, p. 81; cp. p. 34.

⁴See Robert Lightner, Neoevangelicalism Today, 5th ed. (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1978), pp. 188-90; and Raymond Pratt, "The Social Emphasis of New Evangelicalism," Central Bible Quarterly 21 (Winter 1978):18-47.

⁵See Ronald J. Sider, ed., The Chicago Declaration (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974); and Robert Webber and Donald Bloesch, eds., The Orthodox Evangelicals (Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1978), chapter six "A Call to Holistic Salvation," pp. 94-117.

⁶Gary T. Meadors, "John R. W. Stott on Social Action," GTS 1 (Fall 1980):132.

⁷Ibid., p. 147. This conclusion is based on a review of Stott's articles published in the "Cornerstone" column of Christianity Today from September 21, 1979 to May 23, 1980.

Openness to Contrary Viewpoints

An inherent tenet of inclusivism is its openness to contrary theological viewpoints. Several areas of acceptance or tolerance were discussed in the article "Is Evangelical Theology Changing?"¹ which appeared early in the neoevangelical movement. Three of these areas represent major changes in theology which have been demonstrated by subsequent developments. Much could be said regarding each of these areas, but only a brief statement will be made to demonstrate the implications of openness.

A friendly attitude towards science is advocated. Attempts are made to reconcile the conflict between science and scripture.² Evolutionary views of origins are harmonized with creation. The "progressive creationism" theory has been one result. This area of acceptance relates to the whole gamut of the supernatural.

A second area is the "re-opening of the subject of biblical inspiration."³ This included the hermeneutic of historical criticism of the Biblical text. The result has been a divergence of opinion over inerrancy. This conflict is considered the foremost theological issue at the present time.⁴

¹Christian Life, March 1956, pp. 16-19.

²See Carnell, Case for Orthodox Theology, pp. 92-97; and Bernard Ramm, The Christian View of Science and Scripture (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954).

³"Is Evangelical Theology Changing?" p. 18.

⁴See Harold Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), and Harold Lindsell, The Bible in the Balance (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

Another area of doctrinal change as a result of openness concerns pneumatology. "A willingness to re-examine the beliefs concerning the work of the Holy Spirit"¹ has opened the door to the acceptance of charismatics and their major doctrinal differences by the other segments of evangelicalism.

These three areas of openness among others have had a profound influence on the inclusivist position and have moved it to doctrinal conclusions that are difficult, or impossible, for many other believers to accept. Fellow inclusivists reject and speak out against certain conclusions that are reached, but continue to seek cooperation with the ones holding to them. This tenet of openness is a crucial point of contrast between the inclusivist and separatist. The separatist severs his relationship with the evangelical who allows openness to carry him to these inevitable doctrinal changes from the apostolic standard.

View of Separation

Since the foundational tenet of inclusivism is unity, there is very little written regarding the doctrine of separation. Earlier in the movement articles were written to refute separation and defend inclusivism, but current references are in terms of sectarianism.² The inclusivist view of separation must be derived from their explanation of unity, and refutation of the statements and charges made by separatists.

The inclusivist approach to separation was formulated as a reaction to the separatism of fundamentalism rather than from Biblical

¹"Is Evangelical Theology Changing?" p. 17.

²See Webber, Common Roots, p. 64.

exegesis. Inclusivism viewed separation as a rending of the Body of Christ, and isolationism. Application of 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 to ecclesiastical separation was rejected.¹ Barnhouse considered the wrong application of separation to be one of the most grievous sins of the present day. He asserted that no one had the right to be separated from any other believer.²

Two principles were formulated by Carnell to stress unity rather than separation. He advocated that a "Christian should remain in the fellowship that gave him spiritual birth," and the claims of a church should be judged "by its official creed or confession, not by the lives of its members."³ These principles were critically evaluated by Nash and shown to be contradictory to Carnell's own practice.⁴ However, they are accepted as guidelines by many inclusivists.⁵

The parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43) is presented by some as scriptural justification for refuting separation. It is asserted that a believer who attempts to separate the wheat from the tares usurps the prerogative of Christ. He is to keep himself pure, not the church.⁶ Romans 16:17 is also used in refutation of separation.

¹Carnell, Case for Orthodox Theology, pp. 132-33; Donald Grey Barnhouse, "One Church," Eternity, July 1958, p. 20; and Douglas A. Lightly, "The Heterogeneous Yoke" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1970), pp. 20-23.

²Barnhouse, "One Church," pp. 19-20.

³Carnell, Case for Orthodox Theology, pp. 133-36.

⁴Ronald H. Nash, The New Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 89.

⁵Erickson, New Evangelical Theology, p. 195.

⁶Vernon Grounds, in an Eternity reprint, cited by G. Archer Weniger, "Separation Systematized, Part IV," Faith for the Family, March 1979, p. 4.

The reference to those that cause "dissensions and offences" is applied to separatists. Likewise, Titus 3:10 is understood as teaching rejection of the separatist as one who is factious.¹

More recent writers refute separation by their emphasis on unity. Webber summarizes his view of the catholicity of the church by stating, "Catholic means to possess the whole truth, to stand continuous with the past to reject the spirit of sectarianism."² From the context of his book any form of separation would be viewed as sectarianism.

Lovelace is one who does discuss separation. After citing 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, Romans 16:17, and Titus 3:8-11 as texts which counsel separation for false teaching and 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14 for moral delinquency in a chapter entitled "Unitive Evangelicalism," he states, "in these instances the separation Paul enjoins has nothing to do with removal from church structures (either of the guilty party or of a righteous minority), but rather is a matter of shunning, of breaking off intimate fellowship with the offending party."³ Paul is presented as initiating and maintaining urgent public dialog with the legalists. Lovelace asserts that the only example of total separation from antichristian teachers mentioned in the New Testament is 1 John 2:19 where the apostates separated themselves from the church.⁴

¹Billy Graham, "Billy Graham on Separation," Eternity, November 1958, p. 19; and Walter R. Martin, "When is Separation Necessary?" Eternity, January 1961, p. 31.

²Webber, Common Roots, p. 247.

³Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life, pp. 304-05.

⁴Ibid., p. 305.

A pragmatic attitude is conveyed by Harper regarding separation from the Roman Catholic Church. He reasons that since Catholicism maintains a form of unity in spite of its vast internal differences of opinion, there is no need for evangelicals to leave the Catholic Church to join another one. Instead, they should remain in it to promote the renewal of other members.¹

Inclusivists adopt new attitudes and replace the doctrine of separation with other goals and methods. Infiltration replaces separation; a positive proclamation of doctrine replaces attack on error; and recapturing the mainline denominations replaces leaving them to the liberals.² Instead of practicing separation from apostasy, they call for separation from fundamentalists because of their schismatic practice. Indicating that all segments of Christendom have caused disunity, Harper urges that "we need to forgive what is bad in each, as indeed we need to be forgiven by others for the bad which is in us."³

Separation is replaced by affirming both the unity and diversity of the church, and assuming an open position towards each other. "That is, instead of being divided over secondary issues such as separatism, the gifts, cooperative evangelism, or distinctions between fundamentalist, neoevangelical, confessing, radical, or ecumenical evangelicals, or the differences between Calvinists, Arminians, dispensationalists,

¹Harper, Three Sisters, pp. 102-03.

²Nash, New Evangelicalism, pp. 95-97; Harold John Ockenga, "Resurgent Evangelical Leadership," Christianity Today, October 10, 1960, pp. 14-15; and "On Not Leaving It to the Liberals," Eternity, February 1977, pp. 24-25.

³Harper, Three Sisters, p. 47; cp. p. 105.

etc., we must learn to accept this diversity as part of the life of the whole church."¹ These replacements are made by reinterpreting scriptural passages dealing with separation. A classic example is Ladd's treatment of 2 Timothy 2:18-26.²

Guidelines for separation from apostasy, if at all, are presented by Carnell and Lovelace. The two criteria advocated by Carnell are eviction, and apostasy. That is, if a believer is evicted by an apostate group, a new fellowship must be formed. Apostasy is defined as removing the gospel from the denominational creed or confession, or the restriction of the believer's right to preach it.³ These criteria are criticized by Nash as being deficient. He charges that to separate when evicted is tautology and that apostasy is not clearly defined by Carnell.⁴

The guidelines given by Lovelace test separation by its practical consequences. If there were good results from a separation, as in the case of Machen, then it was right to separate. While he refutes ecclesiastical separation, and promotes inclusivism, as indicated

¹Webber, Common Roots, pp. 57-58.

²George Eldon Ladd, "The Evangelical's Dilemma: Doctrinal Purity vs. Visible Unity," Eternity, June 1962, pp. 9, 22. He asserts on the basis of verse 20 that doctrinal differences including false doctrines are to be expected in the church. Instead of condemnation and denunciation of the error of false teachers, the "chief concern is to be the reclamation of the dissidents," by "the vigorous propagation of sound doctrine in the spirit of love as the means of protecting the church against error" (p. 9, vs. 24-26); i.e., visible unity is to take precedence over doctrinal purity. It shall be noted that no comment is made on v. 23: "but refuse. . . ."

³Carnell, Case for Orthodox Theology, pp. 136-37.

⁴Nash, New Evangelicalism, pp. 89-90.

previously, he concedes that separation is sometimes necessary.¹ Like Carnell he advocates separation when forced out, but gives as the reason restriction of conscience.

The main reason Lovelace gives for separation is the need for the healthy members to be transplanted from a "terminally ill" body to a place where they can grow and be of service. But, he recognizes that it is often difficult to determine when the whole body has reached the place of no return, because men are unable to judge this, and there are evidences of renewal and recovery in some "apostate" churches. He admits on this point that 2 Corinthians 6:14 presents a validation for therapeutic separation as a secondary application.²

The conclusion reached by Lovelace is that both inclusivists and separatists are needed. Therefore, both positions must be respected. Both need to heed warnings of overplaying their distinctive emphases.³

The tenets of inclusivism stem from the premise that it is essential to promote the visible unity of the church. Inclusivists advocate love and cooperation, concern for the visible needs of others, and openness to contrary viewpoints while repudiating the practice of separation.

The Tenets of Separatism

The separatist position asserts that persons of contrary theological viewpoints cannot and therefore should not attempt to cooperate in the work of the Lord. Three main tenets distinguish the separatist

¹Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life, pp. 309-10.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., pp. 312-13.

from the inclusivist. They are 1) the priority of doctrine rather than love,¹ 2) the doctrinal purity of the visible church rather than visible unity, and 3) the practice of ecclesiastical separation rather than evangelical ecumenism.

Priority of Doctrine

The separatist is committed to the truth and authority of Scripture. This was the cause of the major separations of the 1920's and 1930's in America. It remains the basis for the separatist movement.

Separatists through the ages have ever had a strong commitment to doctrine. If they have had to make a choice between loyalty to God's truth in His Word and the continuance of personal fellowship with friends and cohorts, they have opted for truth and broken fellowship. . . . Doctrine is important.²

Doctrine is put in a position of priority by the separatist for several reasons. The most obvious reason is the New Testament emphasis on sound doctrine and warnings regarding false doctrine. Evangelism is another reason for the priority of doctrine. Regarding a shift in priorities from contending for the faith to insistence upon the necessity of the new birth, McClain states:

¹An unnecessary tension between doctrine and love is created by equating love with organizational unity, and then elevating love as more important than doctrine (see Carnell, Case for Orthodox Theology, pp. 121, 128). This tension is resolved by a proper understanding of the Biblical concept of love. The writings of John align love with obedience to the Word of God, "if you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (14:15); "if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (14:23; cf. 14:21, 24; 15:10, 12-14; 1 John 5:2-3; 2 John 6). Thus, Biblical love is to be equated with obedience to the Word of God rather than visible unity, and Biblical doctrine is inseparable from the Word of God. Love is a part of Bible doctrine, and not in tension with it. The emphasis of this tenet of separatism then is on the priority of all doctrine.

²Pickering, Biblical Separation, p. 183.

The leaders of fundamentalism were not wrong in giving first place to matters of Christian "faith." For they understood clearly that the new birth is not something which can be produced in a vacuum; and that without certain factors such an experience is totally impossible.¹

The factors mentioned include the supremacy of doctrinal truth.

Further, the separatist is committed to total obedience to every part of Scripture. This is evidence of his commitment to its authority. Two areas of incomplete obedience common to believers are the great commission and ecclesiastical separation.

"The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps the most quoted but least obeyed command He gave to His Church."² While emphasis is put on world evangelism, it is only the first step. Baptism is being sadly neglected by many para-church ministries. The message being taught is limited instead of "teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." The separatist commits himself to obedience in all three parts.³

While the Biblical statements and principles regarding separation are ignored or reinterpreted in much of professing Christendom today, the separatist commits himself to obedience in this area of scriptural teaching because of the priority of doctrine. Ecclesiastical separation will be dealt with in more detail as the third tenet of separation.

¹Alva J. McClain, "Is Theology Changing in the Conservative Camp?" The Brethren Missionary Herald, February 23, 1957, p. 124.

²John C. Whitcomb, Christ: Our Pattern and Plan (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1976), p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 8; cf. David Nettleton, "A Limited Message or a Limited Fellowship," Literature Item No. 10 (Schaumburg, IL: General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, n.d.).

The Purity of the Visible Church

The New Testament places a strong emphasis on the doctrine of the church. The church is recognized as the Body of Christ. This figure denotes the spiritual, rather than the visible unity of the church. In describing the mystical union of the body, Buswell asserts the strong emphasis on the unity of believers in the Body of Christ.¹

While New Testament churches were independent of each other, their members were united by "our common salvation" (Jude 3). The irreducible minimum for unity and fellowship among believers takes a doctrinal form: the doctrine of Christ and of justification by faith only, which is the foundation of the apostles and prophets.²

The purity of the visible church is vital to a clear expression of the spiritual unity of the Body of Christ and its interchurch unity. Thus, it becomes an important tenet to the separatist. Buswell states, "It is the will of God that the church should stand in the world, but separate from the world, maintaining strictly a standard of godly living and pure faith."³

The purity of the church includes a regenerate membership, and an acknowledgement of the authority and dependability of the Word of God. Several reasons for an emphasis on this tenet can be presented. The perpetuation of the church as a divinely ordained institution, and the

¹James Oliver Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 2:221.

²D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, The Basis of Christian Unity (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p. 45; see also Rene Pache, "A Biblical Unity," BSac 108 (July 1951):300-09.

³Systematic Theology, 1:423; and cf. Pickering, Biblical Separation, p. 9.

nature of apostasy require it.¹ Further, the baneful effects of heresy on its hearers calls for rebuke and avoidance.²

With the corruption of the visible church comes the motivation to begin anew.

It is the failure of the professing church to maintain a clear witness to the truth which has caused those who love the truth, in whatever age they have lived, to seek to perpetuate such a witness outside of the religious establishment. Repudiation of divine truth within an organized body of professing Christians demands reaffirmation of truth in a newly established body.³

Some may resign themselves to the fact that the church will be constantly plagued with false teachers and assert that it is not necessary to separate from them. The separatist, however, continues to endeavor to maintain the purity of doctrine and practice set forth for the church in the New Testament.

The Practice of Separation

The priority of doctrine and the purity of the church form the rationale for the practice of separation. Biblical separation has been defined as "the implementation of that scriptural teaching which demands repudiation of any conscious or continuing fellowship with those who deny the doctrines of the historic Christian faith, especially as such fellowship finds expression in organized ecclesiastical structures, and which results in the establishment and nurture of local congregations

¹For a discussion of the nature of apostasy see Pickering, Biblical Separation, pp. 157-63.

²Alva J. McClain, "Editorial," Grace Journal 1 (Spring 1960):4.

³Pickering, Biblical Separation, p. 157.

of believers which are free from contaminating alliances."¹ The nature of apostasy makes separation a perpetual practice.

The scope of separation includes both false doctrine and compromise. This is stated by Whitcomb:

Now God assures us in His Word that the only possible way to perpetuate His truth is to separate it from all forms of error and compromise. A refusal to recognize this fundamental fact is the fatal blunder of modern ecclesiastical ecumenism in all its forms, including evangelical ecumenism. Truth cannot be perpetuated through compromise and compromise cannot be avoided without separation.²

Likewise this scope is stressed by the "Statement on Personal and Ecclesiastical Separation, July 1961" adopted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church as cited by Buswell. It includes separation "from all cooperation in religious activities with those who deny the full authority and dependability of the Word of God," and calls upon "every church and pastor to consider well their existing connections with all who maintain associations with liberal organizations, and seek occasion to form other bonds with those who have broken from liberal influences."³

It is in this area of the scope and implementation of separation that discussion arises among separatists and leads to differing conclusions. Three views are summarized by Dollar. The first view advocates a total boycott of leaders who associate with inclusivists. The second rejects any form of separation from good Christians. The third position

¹ Ibid., p. 10.

² Whitcomb, Christ: Our Pattern and Plan, p. 14.

³ Buswell, Systematic Theology, 1:381.

sees the issue of separating from other believers because of their compromise with infidelity as part of the total doctrine of Biblical separation.¹

A survey of separatist literature reveals several passages of Scripture that are customarily used to support separation from other believers. They include 2 Chronicles 19:2; Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:19-20, 6:3, 5; and 2 Timothy 2:16-18. This is in addition to the passages which indicate that unity with unbelieving apostasy is wrong.

These passages can be placed in several classifications. Some deal specifically with offenses (Matt 18:15-17) or immoral behavior (1 Cor 5:11) of believers. Others deal with church members who appear to be true believers, but whose doctrine, conduct, subsequent discipline, and final outcome testify to their lack of a genuine conversion (1 Tim 1:19-20; 2 Tim 2:16-18).

The example of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 19:2 is a tragic illustration of cooperation between a true believer and an unbeliever. However, as Welch notes,

This failure of Jehoshaphat with Ahab was neither a principle nor practice, but rather an incident in his life. . . . Those of the fundamentalist, separatist convictions must exercise the utmost caution lest they categorize as theological compromisers those who experience an incident of failure rather than the pursuit of a practice or the embracing of a principle contrary to the Word of God.²

¹Dollar, History of Fundamentalism, pp. 280-81.

²W. Wilbert Welch, Does Biblical Separation Destroy Christian Unity? (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Baptist College and Seminary, n.d.), p. 5.

The description of false teachers in 1 Timothy 6:3-5 is concluded with the exhortation, "from such withdraw thyself," (KJV). The textual support for this clause is less weighty than for its omission. It is also to be noted that this passage is best classified as indicating that inclusivism is wrong.

Ephesians 5:11 commands not only a separation from all that belongs to spiritual darkness, but also an exposure of it. The primary implementation of these commands is in the avoidance and exposure of evil deeds. A doctrinal separation, however, comes into action when the unrighteous behavior is the result of apostasy. Romans 1:18-32 is the classic example of wickedness being the fruit of false doctrine. At times true believers display the fruit of darkness by their deviation from sound doctrine, and separation from them is necessary. Since the main emphasis of this passage is on behavior rather than doctrine it will not be treated in this thesis.

Other passages frequently cited in support of separation from believers for doctrinal reasons which serve the purpose of this thesis are: Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6. Thus it is necessary to exegetically consider each of these. Another passage that should be considered is the book of Galatians. It illustrates how Paul handled the three-way division among apostates, true believers, and believers wavering between these two positions.

Conclusion

Priority of doctrine, purity of the visible church, and practice of separation are the tenets of separatism that distinguish its position from inclusivism. While both groups give assent to justification by faith, the authority of the Word of God, and the urgency of

evangelism, their tenets put them in conflict with each other. The visible unity of the church advocated by the inclusivists refutes the purity of the visible church asserted by the separatists. The emphasis on social concern and openness on doctrine contradicts the priority of doctrine. Thus, the emphasis on evangelical ecumenism clashes with separation.

The resolution of these conflicts is hindered by the major premises of their respective positions. Only strict adherence to the teachings of the Word of God regarding separation can bring harmony between these groups of believers.

CHAPTER II

OPPOSING THE DEVIATION OF BELIEVERS FROM SOUND DOCTRINE

In spite of the questions concerning the destination and chronology of the book of Galatians, its message is without question. This epistle stands as the definitive statement on the problem of legalism in contrast to the Christian faith. It deals with the first theological problem of any consequence that arose in the early church.¹ The circumstances that prevailed in the first century are similar to contemporary circumstances.² Therefore, it is instructive to consider the example of the book of Galatians in order to formulate principles regarding separation from doctrinal defection.

The Deviation from Sound Doctrine

Three important conditions which developed in Galatia are observed in 1:6-9. 1) The believers were deserting the truth; 2) they were replacing the truth with a perverted gospel; and 3) they were being disturbed by teachers who desired to distort the gospel.

The deviation from the truth is expressed by the present middle indicative of μετατρέψω, to turn from, to fall away, to become

¹Homer A. Kent, The Freedom of God's Sons: Studies in Galatians (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1976), p. 14.

²See Donald Guthrie, ed., Galatians in The Century Bible (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1969), pp. 38-46, on the modern relevance of Galatians.

apostate.¹ It is used of changing from one philosophic school or political party to another. Hence, it is used here of turning from one conviction to another. The Galatians were allowing certain teachers to sway them. The present tense indicates that they were in the process of turning and their apostasy was not yet complete. Further evidence of their transitory condition is seen by comparing 4:10 with 5:2. Some were observing Jewish religious festivals, but none had submitted to circumcision yet.²

That which the Galatians were deserting is stated by ὁπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς. Καλέω is used particularly of the divine call to partake of the blessings of salvation which is usually attributed to God the Father.³ Thus, they were turning from God Himself and not just a set of beliefs.

Replacing the truth with a perverted gospel is conveyed by the use of ἕτερος and ἄλλος. While it is difficult to discern a distinction between these words, their use in this context shows a contrast. A difference in kind is meant by ἕτερος, and another of the same sort by ἄλλος.⁴ This contrast is expressed by Hendriksen, "the context is clear and decisive: the gospel (?) to which the Galatians are in the process of turning is the perversion of the true gospel (verse 7); it is a gospel (?) different in quality from the one which Paul and his assistants had preached to the Galatians (verse 8), and which the latter had

¹TDNT, s.v. "μετατίθημι," by C. Maurer, 8:161-62.

²Kent, Freedom of God's Sons, p. 32.

³W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 4 vols. in one (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), 1:163.

⁴Ibid., 1:60; and Kent, Freedom of God's Sons, pp. 33-34.

embraced (verse 9); it is a gospel (?) so bad that a curse is invoked upon him who might--and also upon him who actually does--proclaim it (respectively verses 8 and 9)."¹

The Galatians were also being disturbed by teachers who desired to distort the gospel. The present active substantive participle with the article οἱ ταρασσόντες (7) introduces the presence of the false teachers in Galatia, as well as indicating the effect of their activity on the true believers. The literal meaning of ταρασσω, to shake together or stir up, is reflected in its figurative use, stir up, disturb, unsettle, or throw into confusion, as here.² Sometimes it denotes seditious activity which Guthrie prefers here where it is used in conjunction with the metaphor of desertion.³ That the agitators are still in Galatia is revealed by the present tense.

The deliberate intention or desire of the ones stirring up the Galatians is conveyed by the word θέλοντες which implies volition or purpose, and even determination.⁴ Their purpose is to pervert the gospel, μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. This is a strong word meaning to change, alter, or pervert; to transform into something of the opposite character.⁵ The emphasis of εὐαγγέλιον is on doctrinal content rather than on the methods of carrying on the gospel work.⁶ The present tense

¹William Hendriksen, Exposition of Galatians, in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 39-40.

²BAG, pp. 812-13.

³Guthrie, Galatians, p. 63.

⁴Vine, Expository Dictionary, 1:299.

⁵BAG, p. 514; and Vine, Expository Dictionary, 3:180.

⁶Ernest DeWitt Burton, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 22.

of θελώντες indicates that they have not yet succeeded in their intentions and also that they cannot because the truthfulness of the gospel has been eternally established.¹

The identity and origin of the agitators has been the subject of much debate.² The traditional view of Judaizing Christians from outside of Galatia, most likely Jerusalem, who attempted to contradict the ministry of Paul, has much to commend it. The spiritual condition--whether genuinely saved or not--of these teachers is not stated explicitly. The context shows that they were not true believers but that the Galatians were. Hendriksen concludes that they may have joined the followers of Christ for various reasons, but remained legalists at heart, and were Christians in name only.³ The judgment of anathema (1:8, 9) placed on their teaching should also be noted.

The Galatians were misled by the outward claim of the Judaizers that they had accepted Christ while in actual practice they minimized and contradicted His work of atonement. They also attempted to weaken and destroy the influence and authority of Paul. Their emphasis was on the distinctive rites of the Jewish religion combined with other factors to distort the true gospel which he proclaimed.⁴ They would have been

¹R. A. Cole, The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, in TNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 40.

²Cf. Robert Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Congregations," NTS 17 (January 1971):198-212; see summary of views by Herman Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, in NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), pp. 16-18.

³Hendriksen, Exposition of Galatians, pp. 17, 19.

⁴D. Edmond Hiebert, An Introduction to the New Testament, vol. 2: The Pauline Epistles (reprint ed., Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 81.

surprised to learn that their defection was from God Himself because of their zeal for the law of God.¹ They gave assent to what Paul believed but showed their true condition by adding works to it.

The denunciation of the Galatian churches by Paul reveals the wavering doctrinal situation. It also shows the three categories of professing Christians which produced the severe conflict that existed.² Paul is aligned in doctrinal agreement with the apostolic group in Jerusalem which maintained the true Biblical doctrine. The Judaizers were unsaved but professed to hold the same basic doctrines. Even though the Galatians were true believers, they wavered between these two groups. They were impressed and influenced by the precepts of legalism taught by the Judaizers.

The conflict between these groups of believers is evidenced in the change of attitude by the Galatians. While there should have been unbroken fellowship and unity between Paul and them, they began to think disparagingly of him and even questioned his apostolic authority (1:1, 2:1-11, 4:15-16). There should have been unity and peace in their churches, but dissension and conflicts had arisen (5:15).³

The only explanation for the voluntary turning away on the part of the Galatians might possibly be found in 3:1. Paul characterizes them as ὄνοητοι, thoughtless or foolish people who were not stopping to think. This is spiritual dullness. They should have been thinking

¹Guthrie, Galatians, pp. 61-62.

²See *ibid.*, pp. 8-12.

³Hiebert, Introduction to the New Testament, 2:81.

of Christ crucified when the Judaizers began their upsetting ministry.¹ Instead the Galatians were bewitched, ἐβόσκωνεν. They were being carried along as if they had been put under some sort of hypnotic spell.

The wavering of believers between the true and a perverted gospel is a serious situation. Such a situation of deviation from the truth was prevailing in the churches of Galatia.

The Deviation of Peter

In dealing with the situation in Galatia, Paul recounted an otherwise unknown episode that occurred in the church at Antioch (2:11-15). It is another illustration of the conflict between believers when there is a deviation from sound doctrine.

Paul confronted Peter for his actions because he stood condemned, ὅτι κατεγνωσμένος ἦν. The emphasis is on the state of being condemned rather than on an act of condemning him. That is, Paul cannot be accused of judging; he simply addressed the issue as he saw the facts. Peter rendered himself guilty by his own inconsistent action. He acted against his own conscience, his personal revelation from God (Acts 10), and his past custom. Peter's actions were viewed as an attack on the gospel.²

Peter's deviation was manifest by a gradual change in his public practice. It did not involve an actual change in doctrine, but his actions implied a change in his doctrinal beliefs regarding the basis of salvation. The manner of his change is conveyed by the use of

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians (reprint ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp. 122-23.

²Ridderbos, Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, p. 95.

ὑποστέλλω and ἀφορίζω. Peter had customarily eaten with the Gentile believers in Antioch until certain men came who represented the circumcision party. Then Peter started the process of withdrawing from the Gentiles, and separating himself from them. The comment of Vine that ὑποστέλλω is "perhaps a metaphor from lowering the sails and so slackening the course, and hence of being remiss in holding the truth,"¹ enhances an understanding of Peter's actions. "It is the exact opposite of ὀρθοποδεῖω πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν."² The meaning of ἀφορίζω is to separate, take away, or to mark off by bounds.³ That is, Peter was re-establishing the barrier between Jewish and Gentile believers that he had previously attempted to remove.

Not only was Peter's deviation from the correct doctrinal position influential on others, but it is described as ὑπόκρισις, hypocrisy. Usually hypocrisy is the concealing of wrong character, knowledge, or feelings under the pretense of better ones. Here, however, "it was their better knowledge which they cloaked under a mask of worse, the usual type of hypocrisy which proceeds from fear."⁴ The pressure of their influence even made Barnabas, who accompanied Paul in the ministry to the Gentiles, to yield.

The nature of Peter's retreat which influenced others is also characterized as οὐκ ὀρθοποδοῦσιν πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. Burton explains the meaning of ὀρθοποδεῖω as "straightforward, unwavering,

¹Vine, Expository Dictionary, 1:338.

²TDNT, s.v. "ὑποστέλλω," by Karl Rengstorf, 8:598.

³BAG, p. 126; and Vine, Expository Dictionary, 3:345.

⁴Burton, Commentary on Galatians, pp. 108-09.

and sincere conduct in contrast with the pursuing of a crooked, wavering, and more or less insincere course."¹ Its relation to the rest of the phrase "constitutes a definitive limitation of ὀρθοδοξίαν, yielding the sense 'pursue a straight course in relation to the truth of the gospel,' 'to deal honestly and consistently with it, not juggling, or warping, or misrepresenting it.'"²

When put into its theological perspective, what might have been rationalized away by Peter as a minor change of eating habits to make the visitors happy is in fact wavering or misrepresenting the truth of the gospel. Eating habits were an important part of the external evidence of the false doctrine of salvation by faith plus the works of the law. Fortunately, Peter's change was only in action, and not in belief.

The Approach of Paul

The deviation from sound doctrine at Galatia called forth strong opposition from Paul. The two occasions of defection discussed above were dealt with by the same basic approach, namely, direct confrontation with the people involved. The manner of Paul in dealing with believers who waver in doctrine gives direction to succeeding generations for handling the same problem.

The Denunciation of the Galatians

The apostle Paul confronted the Galatians with a severe denunciation of their supplanted loyalty (1:6-9). The whole epistle is devoted to the identification and resolution of their defection from the truth.

¹Ibid., p. 110.

²Ibid., pp. 110-11.

The manner of Paul's approach is revealed by the tone of the epistle. It is that of unmitigated severity throughout with the use of vehement language.¹ The censure is introduced by θαυμάζω, a term expressing Paul's surprise and astonishment at the conduct of the Galatians (1:6). The pronouncement of ἀνάθεμα, likewise denotes the gravity of Paul's rebuke (1:8, 9). In the New Testament it is a strong term indicating separation from God and implying His disapproval. It reflects Paul's assessment of the serious character of the outlook of the ones perverting the gospel.² The repetition of the anathema serves to underscore the extreme seriousness of the situation.

The denunciation includes the identification of the nature of the false gospel. It is "a gospel contrary to what we preached unto you" and ". . . contrary to that which you received" (1:8, 9 NASB). The translation "contrary" reflects the prepositional phrase παρ' ὅ used idiomatically. The fundamental meaning of παρὰ, by the side of, or beyond, "acquires the meaning 'contrary to' from the conception of that which goes beyond (and so transgresses) the limits of the object."³ Hendriksen observes that Paul cannot be considered too severe in his rebuke. Though the Judaizers believed in Jesus Christ for salvation, and the only difference between them and Paul was the addition of strict obedience to certain Mosaic regulations, this addition "was in the nature of a complete repudiation of the all-sufficiency of Christ's

¹D. A. Hayes, Paul and His Epistles (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), pp. 289-91.

²Guthrie, Galatians, p. 64.

³Burton, Commentary on Galatians, p. 27.

redemption."¹ Since this repudiation was contrary to the gospel, the false teachers brought on the condemnation of God (ἀνάθεμα, vss. 8, 9).

Because Paul includes himself in the anathema if he were to deviate from the truth, it is apparent that this is not a conflict of personalities. Guthrie comments,

Here was no outburst of personal anger because men were forsaking what Paul had preached. It was not an issue of personal prestige. The essence of the gospel itself was at stake. If the false teachers were directly contradicting the gospel of the grace of Christ, they could not possibly avoid incurring the strong displeasure of Christ.²

Thus, Paul's approach was to analyze the essence of the conflict in Galatia. He identified it as a false gospel deserving the condemnation of God. It was not a personal disagreement with the false teachers. Such an identification led to this severe denunciation of the Galatians for yielding to the Judaizers. Responsibility for the trouble was placed where it belonged, primarily on the Galatians who were voluntarily turning from the truth, and secondly on the Judaizers for desiring to distort the gospel.

The denunciation of the Galatians for their vacillation was followed by a refutation of the false accusations against Paul (1:10-2:21). In this passage he reviewed the personal details of his apostleship in order to disprove the accusations, to contrast the false doctrine with the true, and to introduce the explanation of the true doctrine. Paul affirms his confidence in the truth of the gospel and his call to apostleship.

¹Hendriksen, Exposition of Galatians, p. 42.

²Guthrie, Galatians, p. 64.

A recurring theme in Galatians is Paul's emphasis on the content of the gospel. This reflects the importance that he places on the purity of doctrine. He refers to the truth of the gospel (2:5, 14), the faith (3:23), and the word (6:6). There is no reason why the Galatians should desert Christ because the truth was preached to them (1:8) and they received it as the truth (1:9). Christ had been openly and clearly proclaimed to them as the only means of salvation (3:1). The stress on sound doctrine counteracts the false and promotes unity among true believers.¹

The Confrontation with Peter

Paul included the episode of his confrontation with Peter in this context in order to continue his line of argument. It helps to demonstrate that the leaders in Jerusalem never had authority over him. He was equal in authority to them even to the point of correcting one of them when he erred. This isolated incident presents another example of how Paul handled the deviation from sound doctrine by other believers.

Paul states the main point of the illustration at once, "I opposed him to his face," κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην (2:11). The meaning of ἀντίστημι is to set against, but it is usually used in the middle sense, set oneself against, oppose, resist, withstand.² It "implies a response made to an attack, whether through offering firm resistance or by opposing with some counter measures."³ Paul regarded Peter's action of withdrawal and separation from the Gentiles as an attack on the truth

¹Hendriksen, Exposition of Galatians, p. 20.

²BAG, p. 66.

³Kent, Freedom of God's Sons, p. 69.

of the gospel. Therefore, he confronted Peter with the significance of his actions. As stated previously, though Peter did not intentionally attack the position of the Gentile believers and of Paul, his actions were in effect such an attack.

The manner and place of the confrontation are indicated. No hostility is implied by *κατὰ πρόσωπον*, but only a personal, face to face encounter.¹ Further, Paul approached Peter publicly, "in the presence of all," *ἔμπροσθεν πάντων* (2:14). Guthrie comments that "Paul considered a public remonstrance was essential, because of the basic principle involved."² Gentile believers had been offended in addition to Paul. Lenski observes that Paul did not act hastily, but waited until he saw things clearly and until the situation had reached a climax such as Barnabas being carried away also.³

Thus, in order to preserve the purity of doctrine, Paul opposed Peter because he had deviated from sound doctrine. Not only does this add weight to Paul's argument to the Galatians, but it also reveals how even the apostles needed to correct one another.

The Motive of Paul

Paul's motive was sincere before God in his desire and attempt to return to correct doctrine. Regarding the Galatians he desired that they would return to the fellowship that they had enjoyed previously. While his tone is severe throughout, there is evidence of heart-felt

¹Burton, Commentary on Galatians, p. 103.

²Guthrie, Galatians, p. 89.

³Lenski, Interpretation of Galatians, p. 99.

compassion by Paul for the people in the churches that he probably established (4:11-20). Paul refused to regain unity by giving in to the teachings of the Judaizers.

The Results of Paul's Approach

Whether the Galatians returned to a sound doctrinal position or whether they followed through in their apostasy to its logical conclusion of a total denial of the faith is not recorded. A small amount of evidence, however, can be given to show that they returned to the truth of the gospel. According to 5:10 Paul is confident that they will not adopt any other view and that God would deal with the one(s) disturbing them. Kent states:

He believed that his readers were truly saved, and were themselves "in the Lord." Consequently his trust was not in the outward appearances which were disconcerting at the moment, but in the Lord who is always faithful to His promises and preserves His own.¹

Since there is no record of any further trouble during the lifetime of Paul, it may be supposed that the Judaizers withdrew from the field in defeat.²

The relationship between Peter and Paul was restored to one of fellowship. It has been noted that Paul's withstanding of Peter was successful. Peter was without defense and it would have been preposterous for him to even make an attempt. He must have accepted his public rebuke in all humility which shows his greatness and God's grace.³

Peter's reference to "our beloved brother Paul" and the commendation of

¹Kent, Freedom of God's Sons, p. 149.

²Hayes, Paul and His Epistles, p. 296.

³Lenski, Interpretation of Galatians, pp. 93-94.

his epistles (2 Pet 3:15-16) demonstrate the power of God's grace to restore fellowship between believers. While some have tried to expand this one incident into a continuing battle between Peter and Paul, it is without sufficient basis in the New Testament.¹ Like the example of Jehoshaphat with Ahab, Peter's failure was neither a principle nor a practice. It must be regarded as but one incident of his life, however serious it may have been.

Another result of Paul's approach to the deviation from the truth of the gospel in Galatia is that the doctrine of grace prevailed. It was defined in Galatians and contrasted to the works of the law. This demonstrates that conflicts when resolved can and should result in spiritual benefits instead of hindrances to the gospel.

Conclusion

The example of Galatians is a study in conflicts between believers. The apostate Judaizers are in contrast to the apostles. The believers in Galatia were wavering between these two positions. The cause of the conflict was both the entrance of the Judaizers who perverted the gospel and the Galatians' voluntary turning to it.

The main emphasis of the epistle is on the deviation by the Galatians from sound doctrine. It is addressed directly to them, and corrects their error. It is not an apologetic addressed to the Judaizers to defend salvation by faith alone. Their error is dealt with only as it relates to the Galatian believers.

Peter's conduct of withdrawal and separation from the Gentile believers was dealt with. It represented a wrong response to the presence and doctrine of the Judaizers.

¹Kent, Freedom of God's Sons, p. 67.

Paul's approach to deflection was stern. He carefully identified the problem for what it was and kept the discussion on the issues rather than personalities. Peter was confronted with the significance of his actions. All through the epistle Paul stressed sound doctrine. The motive of his approach was to restore the fellowship of true believers that had been broken by the intrusion of the false teachers.

The total results of the epistle are not fully known. It is assumed that the relationship between Paul and the Galatians was restored. Peter's commendation of Paul shows their restoration. The doctrinal error would have been corrected in order for fellowship to be re-established. Thus, the exhortations of this epistle accomplished their purpose. There can only be speculation on Paul's actions had the Judaizers prevailed in winning the total allegiance of the Galatians.

In brief, the example of Galatians clearly demonstrates that compromising the gospel requires grave consideration. It is necessary to oppose deviation from the truth.

CHAPTER III

WITHDRAWING FROM THE DISOBEDIENCE OF BELIEVERS

A passage frequently cited by separatists to defend their withdrawal from other believers is 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15.¹ It is used to support separation from both wrong conduct and from direct disobedience to Scripture. Its use for separation is rejected by inclusivists who limit it to moral delinquency, not heretical opinions.² The question is, Does this passage apply only and exclusively to believers who leave their work, live off other believers, and carry on lives of idleness? or, is there a principle here of separation that applies in other situations? Another question follows, If this portion of Scripture does teach a principle of separation, how is it to be implemented in the twentieth century? This chapter will seek to answer these questions by an examination of the context and content of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

The Context of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

A survey of 2 Thessalonians reveals three main issues of concern to Paul. First, the amount of space devoted to the second coming of

¹Pickering, Biblical Separation, pp. 220-23; Robert T. Ketcham, "The Position of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches on Separation," Literature Item no. 6 (Schaumburg, IL: General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, n.d.); John E. Ashbrook, "Separation from Brethren," The Ohio Bible Fellowship Visitor, August-September 1975, p. 3; and John R. Jaeggli, "Dealing with the New Evangelical," Faith for the Family, December 1981, p. 3.

²Graham, "Billy Graham on Separation," p. 18; and Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life, p. 304.

Christ points to the main purpose of writing. Paul wanted to clear up the erroneous teaching that was being spread in his name (2:2), namely, that the Day of the Lord had already come.

Paul spent another large portion of the epistle (3:6-15) warning against idleness based on a report that he had received (3:11). It is generally speculated that the cause of the idleness is the exaggerated emphasis on the nearness of the Parousia. This agrees with the principle that false teaching promotes improper Christian conduct. Hiebert observes, however, that

there is no expressed connection between the doctrinal error and the disorderly conduct of certain members. The doctrinal error apparently did not produce the practical problem, although it may well have stimulated its development.¹

The disorderly are mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 before the report of 2 Thessalonians 2:2 was circulated.

The third area is the references to persecution and opposition (1:4, 3:2). The founding of this church was accompanied by opposition (Acts 17:1-10, 13).² The opposition came from both unbelievers who opposed God in general and from false teachers who opposed Christianity in particular, as noted by the deliberate deceit in 2:2-3. Thus, 2 Thessalonians is not without its references to false teaching.

The false doctrine, wrong conduct, and persecution are countered by positive statements. There is the correction of the wrong by presenting additional information, admonition to maintain the doctrine previously learned, and encouragement. There is an emphasis on sound teaching (2:15, 3:6, 14) and continuing to do right (1:4, 3:4, 3:13).

¹D. Edmond Hiebert, The Thessalonian Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 337-38.

²See discussion by William Steuart McBirnie, The Search for the Early Church (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 65.

From the context of the book it is concluded that Paul wrote to clear up several matters including false doctrine. His method was to stress correct doctrine and conduct.

The context and structure of the chapter needs to be considered. It divides into three main parts. In verses 1-5 the writers request prayer for themselves. The main portion of the chapter (6-15) is devoted to the conflict between the members of the church. The benediction of the book is verses 16-18. There is no direct bearing of the first and last divisions of the chapter on the meaning of 6-15.

The structure of verses 6-15 is indicated by the use of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ and $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$.¹ The major movements and changes in addressee are denoted by $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ (6, 12, 13, 14). It introduces the command directed to all the brethren in verse 6. The disorderly are indirectly addressed in verse 12 through the use of the correlative adjective with the article, $\tau\omicron\iota\zeta\ \tau\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota\zeta$. The change in addressee back to the church occurs in verse 13 with the second person pronoun.

It is assumed that the church at large is addressed in verses 14-15 when the indefinite second person plural pronoun (13) is introduced by $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ to denote some of the members. The particular function of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in verse 14 is discussed by Hiebert. When it is translated "and" as in the NASB, and KJV, a coordinating force is denoted, adding another point in the instructions to the church. A contrast may be intended between the duty of the majority toward themselves and towards the disorderly, denoting an adversative force. He considers the function as

¹James Everett Frame, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 297.

transitional to one further matter in completing the discussion concerning the discipline of the disorderly.¹ The flow of thought in addition to this discussion would point to a distinctive division at verse 14.

This is the view of Guthrie as reflected from his outline when he states, "a similar discipline problem is the case of the man who disobeys Paul's instructions, but who is not to be regarded as an enemy (iii. 14, 15)."² Morris notes that the words of these two verses "are general enough to cover disobedience to anything he has said throughout the Epistle."³ Likewise, the $\delta\epsilon$ in verse 13 is considered emphatic by some.⁴

Explanatory statements to support the command in verse 6 are introduced by $\gamma\acute{o}\rho$. The Thessalonians are commanded to avoid certain brethren because of their knowledge of Paul's example (7-9), the previous command (10), and the report that Paul received (11). These are the subdivisions within the major portion of 6-11.

The outline and structure of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 seem to point to two general statements (6, and 14-15) with specific details and applications inserted between them. A consideration of the content of this passage with emphasis on verses 6 and 14-15 will help determine their general or specific nature.

¹Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 348.

²Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 582.

³Leon Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 257.

⁴Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians, vol. 17 in Helps for Translators (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), p. 208; and Morris, Thessalonians, p. 257.

The Content of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Verse 6

To ascertain the meaning of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, several key words from verse 6 will be examined. The verb παραγγέλλω introduces the content. It conveys the idea of handing on an announcement from one to another, and denotes "to give a command or charge." The noun form is strictly used of commands received from a superior and transmitted to others.¹ This verb is also used in verses 4, 10, and 12 of this chapter. There is an authoritative, military tone to it. Standing as the main verb of verse 6 it receives the explanation introduced in verse 7 by γάρ.

The commanding of the writers is addressed to ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί. This denotes the Thessalonian church at large and describes their spiritual relationship as brothers in Christ. The source of their authority is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the setting is established that Paul and his associates are giving an authoritative announcement or command from the Lord to their fellow believers in the church at Thessalonica.

The specific command is conveyed by the present middle infinitive form of στέλλω, which means, to avoid. Avoiding may be in the sense of taking care to prevent a certain thing (as in 2 Cor 8:20), or of withdrawing from a person (as here).²

This treatment is to be accorded certain believers, παντός ἀδελφοῦ, who are identified by their manner of life. It is not denied

¹Vine, Expository Dictionary, 1:181-82, 209.

²Ibid., 1:92.

that they are brothers in Christ. Nor is such action to be exercised towards those outside of the brotherhood.¹ The adjective παντός in this context signifies that the number of believers involved was not numerous, but rather isolated.

The action receiving censure is ἀτάκτως περιπατούντος which is explained further by the parallel adverbial clause, καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ἣν παρελάβοσαν παρ' ἡμῶν. The use of περιπατέω, go about or walk around, in a figurative sense refers to the walk of life. It means to live, conduct oneself, walk, and is always defined more precisely.² It signifies "the whole round of the activities of the individual life, whether of the unregenerate, Eph. 4:17, or of the believer, 1 Cor. 7:17; Col. 2:6."³ Hiebert states regarding the present tense of the verb that it is a deliberate course of action, a persistent practice, not an occasional lapse.⁴

The adverb that defines more precisely the activities of some believers in Thessalonica is ἀτάκτως. It signifies disorderly, undisciplined, as soldiers not keeping rank. The adjective occurs only once (1 Thess 5:14), the adverb twice (2 Thess 3:6, 11), and the verb once (2 Thess 3:7). How this word is understood determines the application of the passage.

Frame makes a case to limit the meaning to idle conduct. "The reference in περιπατεῖν ἀτάκτως is to the refusal, on the part of a

¹Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 339.

²BAG, p. 655.

³Vine, Expository Dictionary, 1:195; cf. TDNT, s.v. "περιπατέω," by Heinrich Seesemann, 5:944.

⁴Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 339.

small faction of the converts (v. 11 τινός) to work and earn their own living, and to the resultant idleness, want, and meddlesome demand for support from the church, which are mentioned in I 4:11-12 and warned against in I 5:14."¹ While acknowledging that it may be taken in a general sense as disorderly, he argues for the specific sense, idly, on the basis of verses 7-12. The tradition (6) is indirectly explained by Paul's example of industry (7-9), and the quote of verse 10. In verse 11 ἀπαύτως is defined by μηδέν ἐργαζομένους, "doing no work at all."² Further, his interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5:14 is based on reading the content of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 into it.³

Likewise, Milligan maintains that ἀπαύτως is to be understood in the specific sense of idleness. He cites several sources including papyri where it was used to denote not working. The conditional nature of his conclusion undercuts his assertion. "If then these instances can be taken as typical of the ordinary colloquial sense of the verb, we can understand how readily St. Paul would employ it to describe those members of the Thessalonian Church who, without any intention of actual wrong-doing, were neglecting their daily duties, and falling into idle and careless habits, because of their expectation of the immediate Parousia of the Lord."⁴ In addition to Milligan, several other

¹Frame, Thessalonians, pp. 298-99.

²Ibid., p. 299.

³Ibid., pp. 196-97.

⁴George Milligan, St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 154; cf. pp. 153-54 for whole discussion.

commentators readily follow the view of taking ἀπόπτως to specifically mean idleness.¹

Lenski, however, cautions against transferring all the developed disorderliness of the present paragraph into 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Some assert that because the same word is used in both references, it follows that the same kind of disorderliness is in mind. However, Lenski considers the first mention too brief and lacking in details to conclude that the disorderliness was that of stopping work. Rather, "disorderliness could have been of various kinds."²

After citing numerous examples from non-Christian sources, Delling makes the following statement regarding its New Testament use.

Non-Christian examples show that the word group is well-known and important and that it relates to several spheres but especially to that of human conduct, both ethical on the one side and political in the broader sense on the other. In both it characterizes a man as one who sets himself outside the necessary and given order. In view of the attested breadth of meaning one must be on guard against taking it too narrowly in the Thessalonian Epistles. In 2 Th. 3 one might easily conclude from v. 7 that the primary reference of the group is to laziness. But outside Christianity, the verb, when applied to work, does not in the first instance lay emphasis on sloth but rather on an irresponsible attitude to the obligation to work.³

It is concluded then, that ἀπόπτως as used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 is to be taken in its broadest sense to denote any form of

¹ Morris, Thessalonians, p. 168; and Ernest Best, A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians in Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), pp. 230, 334. This view is also taken by Gottlieb Lunemann, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Thessalonians, trans. Paton J. Gloag, in Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament (reprint ed., Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 552.

² R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon (reprint ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), p. 355; see p. 456 for comments on 2 Thess 3:6.

³ TDNT, s.v. "ἀποπτως (ἀπόπτως), ἀποπτέω," by Gerhard Delling, 8:48.

disorderliness carried on as a deliberate course of action in the whole round of one's activities. This broad sense is further supported by its parallelism to παράδοσις which, as it will be seen, is not to be taken in a restricted sense, but as a reference to Christian doctrine in general.

Obviously, by way of application he refers to neglecting their own daily labors (10), and also interfering in the work of others (11). But the command of verse 6 cannot be limited by the immediate application of the following verses. The strong military image of breaking rank, and not following orders must be kept in mind.

The walk of these individuals who are being censured is further described as μη κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ἣν παρελάβοσαν παρ' ἡμῶν which has a bearing on the explanation of ἀτάκτως περιπατοῦντος. While there are textual variants for παρελάβοσαν, it is not necessary to consider them in detail. Whether it should be the second or third person plural makes little difference. Either way the disorderly had received the statements from Paul.¹

Based on the verb παραδίδομι, to hand over, give, παράδοσις means handing down, or over. In the New Testament it is used only in the sense of "that which is handed down," that is, teaching or doctrine.² The emphasis is on what is transmitted, not on how it is transmitted. Thus, it can include both written and oral transmission.

¹See note by William Hendriksen, Exposition of I and II Thessalonians in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), p. 199; Morris, Thessalonians, p. 252; and Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 340.

²BAG, p. 621; and NIDNTT, s.v. "παραδίδομι," by K. Wegenast, 3:774.

In the New Testament παράδοσις is used for two categories of teaching, namely, that which is developed by men, and that which is received from God. It is used in Mark 7 and Matthew 15 for the Jewish tradition which is not laid down in the Bible. Christ designated this "the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). Likewise, in Galatians 1:14 it refers to Jewish tradition generally. Colossians 2:8 refers to any tradition from men.¹

Paul's use of παράδοσις for Christian teaching (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15, 3:6) indicates that its source is the Lord. "The essential point for Paul is that it has been handed down (1 C. 15:3), and that it derives from the Lord (11:23). A tradition initiated by himself or others is without validity (Col 2:8)."² What Paul taught was recognized by the Thessalonians as the Word of God and not of men (1 Thess 2:13).

According to 2 Thessalonians 2:15 tradition assumed both written and verbal forms. Morris observes that Paul "puts no difference between the authority of the written and spoken word. Both alike were in very deed the Word of God, as we see from 1 Thess. 2:13 and 1 Cor. 14:37."³ Accordingly, he expected them "to accept his letters and oral instructions with equal authority."⁴

The relationship of oral teaching to scripture is explained by Bruce as follows:

¹TDNT, s.v. "παράδοσις," by Buchsel, 2:172.

²Ibid.

³Morris, Thessalonians, p. 252.

⁴Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 326.

What was derived from the earthly Jesus and was transmitted through the apostles was at the same time continuously validated by the exalted Lord through His Spirit in the apostles, so that revelation and apostolic tradition are but two sides of one coin. Jesus does not figure simply in apostolic tradition as Moses does in rabbinic tradition: as the ever-living Christ He maintains and authenticates the tradition throughout the apostolic age until it ceases to be oral tradition and becomes Holy Scripture. Tradition is thus one way in which the risen Lord imparts His revelation through the Spirit.¹

Thus, it is understood, then, that $\tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\omicron\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ as used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 is the body of teaching which he received from the Lord. It can therefore refer to Christian doctrine in general.

Thus, the disorderliness of some at Thessalonica is described as not being in keeping with the instruction Paul had given to them. Breaking rank in the sense of living an undisciplined life, and not living according to teaching from God constitutes disobedience. In the final analysis their disobedience was to the Word of the Lord, or sound doctrine.

Verses 7-13

Having stated the command to avoid certain fellow believers because of their disobedient conduct, Paul proceeds to explain the significance of the command for the Thessalonians in verses 7 to 13. Hiebert notes that "'for' introduces an explanatory justification for the command just given."² The structure of verses 7-11 with the change in addressee in verses 12 and 13 has been explained above.

The command of verse 6 was given because the Thessalonians knew how to imitate Paul and his associates and they were not disorderly

¹F. F. Bruce, Tradition Old and New (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp. 31-32.

²Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 340; cf. Lenski, Thessalonians, p. 457.

(οὐκ ἠπακτήραμεν) when they were among them (7). This is developed by the negative conjunction οὐδέ (8) which introduces what his practice was. He did not live off of the support of others but worked for his living. Thus, the specific problem of idleness is not mentioned until verse 8. The other use of ἀπάτως (11) is an apposition to μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους ἀλλὰ περιεργαζομένους, "not busy workers, but busybodies" (11).¹ Contrasting meddling with being idle indicates a broader usage of the word by Paul.

The particular tradition that Paul has in mind is reflected in verse 7 by μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς, imitate us, and in verse 10 τοῦτο παρηγγέλλομεν, this order. As noted from his visit there (Acts 17:1-10), and the first epistle, he had instructed them on many things including a Christian work ethic (1 Thess 4:11-12). It would appear that there was no special emphasis on the instruction regarding working. While they were faithfully doing the other things that were commanded (2 Thess 3:4), a few were disobedient in this area of self-support.

From their structure and content it is concluded that verses 7-11 are subordinate to verse 6 rather than dictating the meaning of it. Verse 12 logically follows as the repetition of the specific command that they were disobeying. It is likewise formulated into the tradition that is to be transmitted.

The instructions to the faithful members in verse 13 stands in contrast to the discussion of the conduct of the disorderly. The emphatic ὑμεῖς δέ introduces the affectionate appeal for them to continue in doing right. Morris notes, "The exhortation is couched in general

¹Hendriksen, Thessalonians, p. 202.

terms. It is broad enough to cover the whole of life, but probably there is meant particularly the obligation to do everything possible to bring back the erring brethren."¹ The appellation ἀδελφοί directs attention back to verse 6 where a new subject was also introduced.

Verses 14-15

As previously noted, verses 14-15 are set off from the preceding by the transitional use of δέ. The new topic is how to respond to the condition, εἰ δὲ τις οὐχ ὑπακούει τῷ λόγῳ ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς. That it is possible that some might not obey Paul's instruction is noted by the conditional clause. The meaning of ὑπακούω goes beyond the root idea, to listen, to the point of submitting to what is heard. Thus it denotes to obey, follow, or be subject to.²

That to which they are to be subject is τῷ λόγῳ, literally "the word." This is the instruction that has been given to them in this present epistle. It is noted that "the occurrence of 'epistle' with the article towards the end of a letter almost always means the letter just being written"³ (e.g., Rom 16:22, Col 4:16, 1 Thess 5:27).

While the immediate application of verses 14-15 is for the Thessalonian church to discipline their disorderly members, it is to be noted that it also includes discipline of any form of disobedience to the things written in 2 Thessalonians. The entire Word of God can be included by way of extension. The instructions of this epistle based on

¹Morris, Thessalonians, p. 257.

²Vine, Expository Dictionary, 3:124; and BAG, p. 845.

³Morris, Thessalonians, p. 258; cf. Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 349.

apostolic authority are equal to the rest of the authoritative Word of God. The command of verse 6 deals with those who break rank with the previous teaching of Paul. The command of verse 14 deals with those who refuse to submit to the authoritative Word of God.

The Principle of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

From the preceding examination of the content of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 it is possible to assert the general nature of the statements in verses 6, and 14-15. It has been demonstrated that the terms should not be limited by the context. In verse 6 ἀπόκτως, περιπατούντος, and παράδοσιν are broader than their specific uses in verses 7-11. Likewise, ὑπακούει and τῷ λόγῳ ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς of verse 14 point to a wider scope than the immediate context.

The structural indicators of the passage show the distinction between the general and specific references. The subordinate material of verses 7-12 is related to the main verb of verse 6 in order to apply it to the Thessalonian situation. Verses 13, and 14-15 are introduced by connectives that make them distinct from the specific statements, but also demonstrate a relevance.

Portions of the epistle stress the need for the Thessalonians to be discerning regarding those who claim to be believers and are even leaders. Concern over false doctrine and perverse men is apparent. The exhortations of the third chapter are addressed to true believers. There is an emphasis on tradition as it stands for revelation.

That 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 presents a general principle which reaches beyond the immediate situation in Thessalonica is asserted by others also. McBirnie states,

It was inevitable that the human element of disorderly conduct should arise, even in the church of the redeemed. How should the Thessalonian church deal with it, and hence how should churches everywhere cope with such behavior? St. Paul provides the universal principle in 2 Thessalonians 3, within a specific situation; namely, that those who refuse to work should not be supported by the church.¹

Pickering's statements concur. He understands this passage as setting forth a principle for dealing with brethren who do things that are wrong either because of incomplete knowledge or because of deliberate disobedience to some teaching of scripture. He declares, "This principle should not be overlooked by an overemphasis on the particular situation in this church to which the principle was applied."²

The conclusion is reached, therefore, that the topic of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 is the believer who carries on a life of insubordination to what he has been taught in the Word of God. It applies to any form of disorderliness. Specific measures are delineated to correct the disobedient and preserve the purity of the church.

The Implementation of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Having determined that this passage in 2 Thessalonians is applicable to separation, the question of implementation needs to be considered. Three words denote the action of the church towards a disobedient believer. These words are accompanied with a note of caution.

The first word is στέλλομαι from στέλλω (6). In the active voice it means to set, place, set in order.³ It is a placing by a

¹McBirnie, Search for the Early Church, p. 66.

²Pickering, Biblical Separation, p. 221.

³Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 587.

volitional act, not mechanically. The idea of withdrawing from a person or avoiding him comes from the subject placing himself away from the other person. It is this connotation of the word that is found in 2 Thessalonians 3:6. Since it is only used twice in the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor 8:20), it is without exact parallel and needs to be expounded from the context. Rengstorf's comments are insightful:

It should not be overlooked that the text itself does not suggest either formal excommunication from the church or the suspension of table fellowship, cf. 1 C. 5:11. . . . Interest focuses not so much on the individual Christian whose walk is disorderly but rather on the other members of the congregation who might be led into similar courses by contact with him. . . . Its purpose is to keep the community pure rather than to purge it from unhealthy elements. This is possible only if in certain circumstances one may "hold aloof" even from a Christian brother.¹

To implement this admonition of separation requires a believer to personally and volitionally place himself where he is out of contact with another believer who is living in disobedience to the instructions of God's Word. This is necessary for his own spiritual welfare as well as that of the church. It may have to be done even within the context of a church. The present tense denotes that it is to be his practice.²

The second word indicating a separation is σημειούσθε (14) from σημειώω, to mark, take special notice of someone. Josephus uses σημειώω with the idea of merit in the command of Artaxerxes for the chroniclers "to note" the name of Haman as worthy. The thoughts of personal involvement, mark for oneself, and continued observation are conveyed by the present middle imperative form. It does not necessarily imply a public identification, but a discernment by the other members

¹TDNT, s.v. "στέλλω," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 8:589.

²Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 339.

individually. In this context it is not so much a prohibition of a relationship in everyday things as it is specifically in a spiritual relationship.¹

The emphasis then is for believers to observe the general conduct of disobedience of another believer and designate that man in their thinking. Disobedience to the instructions from the Lord is not to be ignored.

The last word dealing with separation is *συναναμίγνυσθαι*, with the negative (14) present middle infinitive form of *συναναμείγνυμι*. It is found in the New Testament only in 1 Corinthians 5:9 and 11, besides here. Greeven notes that the original concrete sense is to mix together, as in a prescription for mixing various ingredients. It is also used with reference to human intermingling such as the relation of characters in a dialogue or the citizens with a homecoming army. In addition to mingling, a deeper connotation of intimacy is evident in its use. This use is reflected in the Septuagint in Hosea 7:8 for the mixing of Ephraim with the nations to denote the forfeiture of their purity. In 1 Corinthians 5:9 and 11 it is used to forbid mingling and intimate association with other believers with immoral conduct. The point here is that of keeping the church pure by removing evil from within it rather than by merely avoiding all contact with outsiders.²

This prohibition of intimate association or mingling is the emphasis in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 for the purpose of restoring the erring brother. Hendriksen indicates that this further explains the withdrawal

¹TDNT, s.v. "σημεῖον . . . σημειῶ," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 7:266.

²*Ibid.*, s.v. "συναναμείγνυμι," by Heinrich Greeven, 7:852-54.

of verse 6. The church as a whole "must not associate with such an individual on intimate terms. They should not welcome him into the company of close friends, agreeing with him, approving of his conduct, etc."¹

These steps of separation are to be taken in the context of the proper motive. The goal of ἐντροπή, to be put to shame (14). Such action should result in the disobedient member being turned upon himself, thus producing a feeling of wholesome shame which in turn involves a change of conduct.² Then the disobedient would be restored in the sight of the others and enjoy full fellowship again.

Further, the action is to be with brotherly concern and admonition (15). The exhortation μὴ ὡς ἐχθρὸν ἠγέσθε warns against having a wrong attitude towards a disobedient believer. While he is to be designated in their thinking as disobedient, he is not to be considered, regarded, or thought of as an enemy. The verb ἠγέομαι, to think, consider, or regard, "indicates that their attitude toward him must not be based on their 'inner feeling or sentiment, but on the due consideration of external grounds.' Aroused feelings must not lead to a wrong evaluation of a man's true character."³

The word ἐχθρός is an adjective meaning hostile. In the active sense it is hating, and as a substantive, enemy or adversary. The New Testament uses it for several categories of enemies: the Devil (Matt 13:39); death (1 Cor 15:26); men who are opposed to Christ, His servants,

¹Hendriksen, Thessalonians, p. 206.

²Vine, Expository Dictionary, 1:77.

³Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 351, quoting Thayer, Lexicon, p. 276.

or Israel (Phil 3:18, Rev 11:12, Luke 1:71); the unregenerate in their attitude towards God (Col 1:21); and personal foes (Matt 5:43-44 where enemy is parallel to persecutor). It is used of the professing believer who would be a friend of the world, thus making himself an enemy of God (Jas 4:4), and of Paul because he told his enemies the truth (Gal 4:16).¹ If Paul's order to avoid the disobedient was taken wrongly it would put believers into a category such as the above. Lenski notes that such action would close the door against the disorderly, and it should remain open as long as repentant shame may be brought about.²

Instead of actions arising out of hostility, the work of the obedient is to *νουθετεῖτε ὡς ἀδελφόν*. The use of *νουθετέω* is significant because the term contains several fundamental elements which must be noted. It "describes an effect on the will and disposition, and presupposes an opposition which has to be overcome. It seeks to correct the mind, to put right what is wrong, to improve the spiritual attitude."³ Jay Adams emphasizes three elements. 1) It implies that a problem or obstacle exists which must be overcome. 2) Direct verbal confrontation is the means to be used to bring about a change. 3) This confrontation is motivated by love and deep concern for the benefit of the wrongdoer.⁴ Disciplinary punishment is not contemplated in *νουθετέω*. However, disciplinary action is not ruled out if the corrective word does not effect the necessary change.

¹Vine, Expository Dictionary, 2:30; cf. TDNT, s.v. "ἐχθρός," by Werner Foerster, 2:813-14.

²Lenski, Thessalonians, p. 468.

³TDNT, s.v. "νουθετέω, νουθετία," by Johannes Behm, 4:1019.

⁴Jay E. Adams, Competent to Counsel (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 41-50.

Thus, the obedient must recognize the disobedience of some members as an obstacle that exists and that must be overcome by confrontation motivated by brotherly concern. The balance is stated by Hiebert,

While refusing intimate association with him as though there were nothing amiss, they must not simply neglect him but patiently admonish him, putting him in mind of his duty by calling attention to his failing. They must remonstrate with him "as a brother," because he still is a brother, even though misguided and failing. Paul is concerned about protecting each man's status as a Christian brother and restoring him to usefulness in the brotherhood.¹

Neither his sin nor his salvation are to be overlooked.

Conclusion

An examination of the context and content of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 gives an answer to the questions regarding application and implementation of separation. This passage presents a general principle of separation from believers who carry on a life of insubordination to the Word of God. While its immediate application in the church at Thessalonica was idleness, and meddling, it is not to be limited to these specific areas of disobedience. This is indicated by the scope of the terms and the structure of the passage.

The implementation of separation from disobedient believers is accomplished by removing oneself from contact with an insubordinate brother (6). This is implied by the admonition to discern the general conduct of disobedience, and designating it as such. Intimate association or mingling is prohibited.

The motive for separation from the insubordinate is maintenance of the purity of the church and the restoration of the insubordinate. All true believers are to be regarded as brothers in Christ, but the sin of the disobedient cannot be ignored.

¹Hiebert, Thessalonians, p. 351.

CHAPTER IV

TURNING AWAY FROM THE DISSENSIONS OF BELIEVERS OVER SOUND DOCTRINE

Romans 16:17-18 is another text teaching separation from doctrinal error. It is variously applied, however. The primary application is to apostasy.¹ Some have used it as a text against separatists for causing schism or dissension within the body of Christ.² Others use it in support of separation from believers who are controversial, causing divisions that are contrary to sound doctrine.³ In light of the various applications, this passage will be studied in order to determine the identity of those causing dissension and what should be the proper response to them.

The Context

The book of Romans stands "as a doctrinal treatise to expound the complexities of the faith."⁴ Paul traces the doctrine of soteriology from the universal need to its effect on the daily life. In the

¹Pickering, Biblical Separation, p. 175.

²Graham, "Billy Graham on Separation," p. 19; and Martin, "When is Separation Necessary?" p. 31.

³Paul R. Jackson, "The Position, Attitudes, and Objectives of Biblical Separation," Literature Item no. 12 (Schaumburg, IL: General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, n.d.); and Ashbrook, "Separation from Brethren," p. 3.

⁴Robert G. Gromacki, New Testament Survey (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 181.

concluding chapter he presents a minor purpose for writing. The warning of 16:17-18 seems to have been included as a safeguard for the recipients against the errors and practices that had crept into other churches.¹ It has been noted that "against errors such as these St. Paul has throughout been warning his readers indirectly, he has been building up his hearers against them by laying down broad principles of life and conduct, and now just at the end, just before he finishes, he gives one definite and direct warning against false teachers."²

The differences in content and tone of these verses from the rest of the book have been stressed.³ It is asserted that their abruptness interrupts the series of greetings without an obvious purpose. However, instead of being disjointed, the content of the chapter aids the understanding of verses 17-20.

By the series of greetings Paul recognizes the harmony and close bond of love existing within the church at Rome. It is based on their faithful obedience in the apostolic teaching (19, cf. also 17). He does not want this harmony to be disturbed like it has been in other churches. He exhorted them to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (16a). Cranfield notes, "the injunction to greet one another with a holy kiss, pointing as it does to the need and the obligation to maintain the peace

¹Hiebert, Introduction to the New Testament, 2:179.

²William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, ICC, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), p. 429.

³Cf. James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in vol. 3 of The Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1967), p. 721; and Ernst Kasemann, Commentary on Romans, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), p. 397.

of the church, contains within itself an explicit warning against those things which are able to destroy that peace and against the unholy kisses of those who would attach themselves to the church's fellowship insincerely, remaining all the time alien from it in doctrine or life."¹

Further, the statement, "all the churches of Christ greet you," (16b) stresses the unity of all the churches with Rome. This is the spiritual unity that results from the great doctrine of salvation which has been presented in this epistle. Lenski asserts that the admonition is an integral part of the whole letter, and in its proper place because it is an "admonition to let no contrary doctrine and no teachers lead anyone astray from this unity."²

The context of Romans 16:17-20 stresses the importance of these verses. In no way should the believer allow the great theme of Romans to be marred or destroyed, nor should the ensuing peace from salvation be disturbed by the deceitful troublemakers. Thus, the unity of the chapter and likewise of the epistle is maintained.

The Source of the Dissensions

The identity of the ones against whom Paul is warning the Romans has been the topic of much speculation. Whether or not these men had already come to the church in Rome does not have any direct bearing on their identity. Cranfield lists the possibilities as the Judaizers,

¹C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), p. 797.

²R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (reprint ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 915.

antinomians, "strong brothers" (14:1-15:13) who were selfish, people with gnosticizing tendencies, or self-centered members of the church.¹

The only identification given in the text is the result of their actions (17) and the description of their character (18). The conduct of these troublemakers had two results: dissensions and hindrances. The fact that Paul is warning against certain persons is denoted by τοὺς . . . ποιοῦντας. This particular usage of ποιέω refers to the events or conditions that one brings about.²

The first condition that these men bring about is διχοστασίας, literally a standing apart. It is used in the Textus Receptus in 1 Corinthians 3:3 alongside of ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις. The only other use is in Galatians 5:20, where it is between ἐριθεῖαι and αἰρέσεις. Its use in a context with jealousy and strife, or disputes and factions show both its fleshly connotation and its party spirit.³ It is further noted that it is within the ἐκκλησία that διχοστασίαι arise.

The second condition produced is σκάνδαλα. The metaphorical use of σκάνδαλον, which developed from its meaning of trap or snare, denotes "anything that arouses prejudice, or becomes a hindrance to others, or causes them to fall by the way."⁴ Here it refers to conduct which would create a spiritual prejudice against sound doctrine and thus hinder spiritual progress.

The point of reference of the divisions and hindrances is παρὰ τὴν διδασχὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐμάθετε. What these men did was παρὰ (beside or

¹Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, 2:801.

²BAG, p. 687.

³TDNT, s.v. "διχοστασία," by Heinrich Schlier, 1:514.

⁴Vine, Expository Dictionary, 3:129.

beyond in the sense of contrary to) the common early Christian teaching or doctrine (6:17).¹

Regarding the apostolic doctrine in contrast to false doctrine Lenski instructs,

Note well that the apostolic doctrine never causes either inward or outward rents in the church, either division of mind or schism in communion and fellowship. . . .

On the other hand, because of its very nature every false doctrine divides. It separates him who holds it and separates all others whom he succeeds in getting to hold it.²

The men against whom Paul warned are not in total agreement with sound doctrine because truth unites, and falsehood divides.

While verse 18 is given to explain (γάρ) why Paul exhorted the Roman church to be on guard, it also describes the character of the troublemakers. They are described according to their selfish motives and deceptive manners.³ In contrast to serving (δουλεύουσιν) Christ they serve their own κοιλίᾳ. This term means belly in the physical sense, but is extended to mean appetite. It has been understood in various ways in this verse as discussed by Cranfield. He concludes that the most probable interpretation is "serving oneself, of being the willing slave of one's egotism, of that walking according to the flesh and having one's life determined by the flesh, to which 8:4 and 5 refer."⁴

Another characteristic of the troublemakers that elicited Paul's warning is their deception of the unsuspecting. This is accomplished by

¹Thayer, Lexicon, p. 478; and Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, 2:798.

²Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, pp. 916-17.

³Sanday and Headlam, Commentary on Romans, p. 430.

⁴Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, 2:800.

their language. The deceivers use χρηστολογία, fair speaking, smooth and plausible speech, and εὐλογία, fine speeches, well chosen (but untrue) words, flattery.¹ The victims of their fair and flattering speech are the ἄσυνων. In this context it signifies to be unsuspecting, and is used of the innocent who expect nothing bad and are free from evil thoughts.² Thus they are deceived and led astray from the truth. It can be considered synonymous with σκάνδαλον in verse 17.³

The results of their actions and the nature of their character which demanded the warning are not enough to identify them. There is not enough evidence given to be positive. Particular details cause some to draw specific conclusions. For example, the reference to serving their bellies has been understood to indicate antinomian character.⁴ Lenski indicates that the οἱ τοιοῦτοι which connects the ones causing the divisions and hindrances (17) to their selfish and deceitful character (18) is to be taken in a general sense.⁵ As a substantive it indicates such a person "either in such a way that a definite individual with his special characteristics is thought of, or that any bearer of certain definite qualities is meant."⁶ Paul may have had one particular group in mind, or possibly more than one. "He may have been warning in

¹Thayer, Lexicon, pp. 671, 260; and BAG, pp. 894, 323.

²Vine, Expository Dictionary, 2:185; and Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, p. 920.

³TDNT, s.v. "σκάνδαλον," by Gustav Stahlin, 7:356.

⁴E.g., F. F. Bruce, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 278.

⁵Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, p. 918.

⁶BAG, p. 829.

a general way against a danger which he knew would always threaten the churches but could present itself in many different forms."¹

Further, it would be wrong to limit the application of this admonition to exact duplicates of these errors as if no new ones could arise. Instead, the injunction is not only to keep away from total rejecters of the gospel, but also professing believers who are errorists and teach falsely.²

Thus, it is concluded that Paul is warning the Roman church against any and all who cause dissensions and hindrances that are contrary to the gospel, and who are not subject to Christ, but deceive the unsuspecting. This description includes false teachers such as the Judaizers of the first century, as well as believers who are eager to cause divisions and set stumbling-blocks in the way of other believers. The motive of this latter group is not out of a theological or practical conviction which they hold, but the desire to gratify their self-importance.³ The identity of the ones causing dissension is determined by their lack of faithfulness to the truth of God's Word.

The Response to the Dissension

Paul urges the believers in Rome who have embraced the gospel as it was commonly proclaimed by the apostles to keep their eye on those who go beyond this doctrine, and to turn away from them. These responses are conveyed by the present infinitive $\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\nu$ and the present active imperative $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\tau\epsilon$.

¹Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, 2:802.

²Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, pp. 917-18.

³Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, 2:801-02.

Outside the New Testament $\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ has the meaning to look at, especially to look at critically as a judge, philosopher, or historian does. This inspection can be for the purpose of ascertaining a propitious time, avoiding danger, or accomplishing a purpose. It can also mean to hold something as a model before one's eyes.¹

In its New Testament usage, $\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ has retained the basic concepts of looking with a contemplative and mental consideration to accomplish a purpose. Philippians 3:17 reflects the sense of a critical consideration and then on the basis of the inspection holding it as a model. This is the opposite of Romans 16:17 which has the meaning of looking at to consider and know the character of so as to avoid.² Likewise, the use in Galatians 6:1 is to look to one's self so as to avoid falling into temptation. Thus, the believers are to recognize them as being the troublemakers that they are.

The imperative $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\tau\epsilon$ means to turn away from, or turn aside. It is used for the turning away from righteousness by the unsaved. Just as an unrighteous man cannot tolerate God, so a believer should not tolerate sin, but turn away from it (1 Pet 3:12). Thus, the use of $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\acute{\iota}\nu\omega$ in Romans 16:17 is taken to mean that believers are not to tolerate the ones causing dissensions and offenses regarding the truth.

The manner in which the church at Rome is to turn is indicated by Godet: "There will be no need to enter into communication with them; all that is necessary will be simply to turn the back to them."³ It is

¹TDNT, s.v. " $\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\acute{\epsilon}\omega$," by Ernst Fuchs, 7:414-15.

²Ibid., p. 415; and Vine, Expository Dictionary, 3:43.

³F. Godet, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, trans. A. Cusin (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), pp. 496-97.

not devious to turn away from the ones who refuse to hold sound doctrine or who deviate from it. Turning away prevents division by not giving room to those who divide. "They keep the unity of the Word intact against those who would invade and disrupt the unity."¹

It is a turning away from them (ἀπ' αὐτῶν), not just their doctrine. Because of the doctrine that they hold, they cause divisions. On account of their doctrine it is necessary to avoid their company. Cranfield concludes, "The words καὶ ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ' αὐτῶν clarify and strengthen ΟΚΟΠΕῖν: the Roman Christians are not only to mark such people in the sense of recognizing them for the danger which they are: they are actually to avoid them, to keep out of their way."²

The Reasons for Turning Away

The reasons for the exhortations of verse 17 are given in verse 18 which is connected to it by γάρ. The character of those producing divisions and stumbling-blocks is sufficient reason to turn away from them. This has been dealt with in ascertaining the identity of the ones causing the trouble.

In addition to the character of the troublemakers, the believers should turn away from them because of their own testimony, character, and assurance as believers. Paul presents these three reasons in verses 19-20 which are connected to the preceding by the γάρ of verse 19. He is concerned lest they are turned away from their faithful obedience.³

¹Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, pp. 916-17.

²Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, 2:798.

³John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, vol. 2, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 236.

The church at Rome has a testimony to maintain. Their obedience, ὑπακοή, has been reported among all the churches. Because they have given heed to believe and act upon the doctrine which they have learned (17), Paul exhorted them that they would continue and remain faithful. Their testimony gives evidence that false teaching with its resulting divisions has not entered the church yet.

Another reason for the exhortations of verse 17 is their character. It is Paul's desire that no one would spoil the Roman believers. He wants them to be discreet and wary (19), that is, to be constant with their obedience. To be wise unto or for the purpose of that which is good, stands parallel to being innocent in what is evil. "Innocent" is the best translation of ἀμεπαύουτος, which means literally, unmixed, the absence of foreign mixture, or pure. In its metaphorical use, as here, it depicts what is guileless, sincere, "with the simplicity of a single eye, discerning what is evil, and choosing only what glorifies God."¹ To maintain such purity requires turning away from those who go beyond the sound doctrine and bring in devisive elements.

The third reason why these exhortations are given is the assurance that the God of peace will bring the victory over Satan for them. The preceding verses have in view the divisions caused by the contrary doctrine which Satan seeks to promote. God will establish peace in contrast to conflict, discord, and division by the defeat of Satan. This assurance encourages obedience to the admonitions.²

¹Vine, Expository Dictionary, 2:196.

²Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, 2:237.

Conclusion

Paul saw the need for the church in Rome to be admonished to be on guard in order to avoid dissensions over sound doctrine (17-20). Therefore, he included in the closing chapter these four verses. In spite of appearing to be out of place, their importance and relevance are observed. The doctrine which they had learned and which Paul presented throughout the epistles was subject to abuse when some went beyond it. The result is divisions and stumbling-blocks within the church.

Because the results of their actions, and their character, are descriptive of many groups of errorists, it is difficult to determine which, if any one group, Paul had in mind. These descriptions can even be given of true believers who are overtaken by their self-importance. Thus, this passage is applicable to all within the church who cause dissension over sound doctrine, whether they reject part or all of it.

The proper response to dissension is to be on guard against those whose beliefs are not aligned with the totality of Scripture and to discern their presence when they come. Then it is necessary to obey the imperative to turn away from them in order to maintain the unity of the teaching of Scripture.

The reasons for giving the admonitions not only relate to the actions and character of those who cause the trouble, but also to the testimony of believers who live in obedience to the Word of God. It is not only necessary to inform the church of the truth of the gospel, but it is also necessary to alert them to the craftiness of false teachers and erring believers. There must be wisdom to discern the difference between separation in obedience to the commands of Scripture, and

devisiveness as a result of contrary doctrine. While the discord of wrong doctrine troubles the hearts of sincere believers, the assurance of the victory of the God of peace brings encouragement.

CHAPTER V

PRINCIPLES OF SEPARATION

That the Bible teaches separation from other believers because they are departing from sound doctrine in their beliefs and conduct has been established by the exegetical consideration of three key texts. Their use for this purpose is rejected by believers holding the inclusivist position. Their application to true believers has been demonstrated, however. The inclusivist policy which promotes evangelical ecumenism to unite all true believers and seeks to impress, for example, liberal and Catholic segments of professing Christendom cannot be substantiated from Scripture.

Principles of separation derived from the passages considered will be formulated in this concluding chapter. First, principles regarding the objects of separation need to be established to clarify from whom other believers should separate. Second, principles regarding the meaning of separation speak to the issue of implementing the Biblical exhortations as they relate to the inclusivist-separatist controversy.

The Objects of Separation

Three categories of believers have emerged from the study of these passages on separation. The Galatian churches are examples of believers who deviate from sound doctrine. They gave heed to the unsaved Judaizers who distorted the truth of the gospel, and turned from it. The result was broken fellowship with those who represented the truth.

In the second category are the believers who disobey the Word of God as some in the Thessalonian church did. They were insubordinate to what they had been taught by the apostles. Not only their wrong conduct but also their wrong attitude toward spiritual training is a cause of concern to their fellow Christians.

The third group of believers who are objects of separation are those who produce divisions and impede the progress of the gospel (Rom 16:17-18). The source of this kind of trouble is doctrinal, going beyond, or contrary to the things they had learned. Believers causing division and hindrances are self-serving and deceptive.

These categories of believers characterize the inclusivists of today. From the basic beliefs held by evangelicals, it is assumed that inclusivists are true believers. But the premise of inclusivism is contrary to the Scriptural admonition to discern. Instead of being on guard (Rom 16:17) and noting the disobedient (2 Thess 3:14), inclusivism promotes the cooperation of persons with contrary theological positions in the work of the Lord.

The visible unity of the church as advocated by inclusivism is contrary to the Biblical examples. Disunity developed between the Galatian believers and Paul because of the false doctrine. The exhortation given by Paul was to return to unity with him. No "call" was issued to enter into "dialogue" with the Judaizers in order to harmonize their doctrine with the truth. The Thessalonians were to seek the restoration of the disorderly, but they were to be regarded as being disobedient until their restoration was accomplished.

Instead of promoting the unity of the visible church, the inclusivist position has caused divisions and hindrances to the progress of

the gospel among fellow believers. Lightner notes regarding the divisiveness of visible unity, "what the fundamentalist is said to have done in opposition to liberalism and the social gospel message, the neo-evangelical does in opposition to fundamentalism with respect to the doctrine of separation."¹ An act of separation that unites believers with unbelievers, but divides them from other believers is contrary to the doctrine of true spiritual unity as it is illustrated in the unity of the Godhead (John 17:21). Regarding Peter's withdrawal from the believers at Antioch, Cole observes, "Peter would not realize it, but this withdrawal from fellowship with Gentile Christians was tantamount to saying that they were not as good as Jewish Christians and that in some way they lacked something of the fullness of the gospel."²

The overemphasis on social concern and openness to contrary viewpoints causes believers to deviate from sound doctrine. Social action carried to the point of making it equal with evangelism eclipses the gospel. It is comparable to the addition of circumcision and the law to the gospel as in Galatians. A friendly attitude toward scientific theories of ultimate origins results in adjusting the doctrine of creation to fit into the scheme of evolution.³ Instead, the Biblical doctrine of creation is to sit in judgment on all theories of origins devised by man. This openness to the authority of science is applied to all statements of a scientific nature in Scripture.

¹Lightner, Neoevangelicalism Today, p. 94.

²Cole, Galatians, p. 77.

³Robert T. Ketcham, "A New Peril in These Last Days," Schaumburg, IL: The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, n.d. (Mimeographed).

The rethinking of inspiration is a result of the influence of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy on the inclusivists. The result can only be deviation from the Biblical doctrine. Likewise, the openness to contrary views on pneumatology has promoted the charismatic movement with its error and excesses.

The tenets of inclusivism regarding separation reflect disobedience to the instructions of God's Word. There is a naive approach to the theological differences that exist. Remaining in apostate denominations and organizations instead of carrying out the principles of Scripture is condoned. The pragmatic guidelines for separation are considered a matter of conscience.¹ An insubordinate response to the doctrine of separation is clearly evident.

Further, the inclusivist position is to be avoided because the doctrinal error of believers is to be confronted. This is demonstrated by the example of Paul in opposing Peter for his association with the false teachers and their rejection of the truth. Confrontation may be on an individual basis or of a whole church. Paul assumed this responsibility on the basis of his apostolic authority. Today the Biblical commands form the basis of authority for others. Guthrie advises, "the modern movement towards Church unity would do well to ponder, before being too generous in its attitude towards groups of different outlooks, whether or not there is any danger of compromising the true Christian position as understood by the apostolic church."²

Avoiding the inclusivist position for these two reasons involves separating from those who work in cooperation with unbelievers. A

¹Lightner, Neoevangelicalism Today, p. 94.

²Guthrie, Galatians, p. 43.

position and those who hold it become a single entity that must be treated as such. Thus, it is necessary to separate from some believers because they deviate from sound doctrine, disobey the instructions of Scripture, and cause dissension in the Body of Christ. Confrontation over doctrinal error and disobedience is provoked by the compromiser (cf. Gal 2:11, Peter "stood condemned"). This confrontation eventuates in separation from the inclusivist if he does not bring his doctrine and practice into conformity with the Scriptural norm.

The Meaning of Separation

It is possible to determine how to implement the principles of separation from the passages studied. Several words and examples define the meaning, goals, and means of separation.

In Galatians separation is taught by example. The emphasis is on direct confrontation of the defecting believer. Paul denounced their movement towards falsehood by identifying the error and emphasizing the truth. He also opposed an erring believer to his face. No command is given to withdraw from believers who were deviating like this, but the need for confronting the wrong is made clear. The situation in the Galatian churches also demonstrates that compromise separates believers even if there is no intention of separating. It is not known what action Paul would have advocated if the Galatians had not responded to the confrontation and denunciation.

Two actions to be taken are indicated in both 2 Thessalonians 3:6, and 14, and Romans 16:17. First, believers are to mark the disobedient believer, and consider the action of the divisive member. Both convey the ideas of discernment and designation. Inclusivism ignores the need to be discerning of other believers. It is easy for separatists

to separate without adequate discernment of another believer.¹ Secondly, it is necessary to avoid the disobedient and to turn away from the one causing dissension. This is to remove oneself from contact, giving approval, or expressing agreement. The emphasis is on avoiding association. The stronger term *συναναμίγνυμι* indicates intimate association or mingling.

Thus, the meaning of separation from other believers over doctrinal error includes two stages of action. The first is to discern the error and designate the believer as a wrongdoer. This is followed by the second stage which is to break off the association with him or avoiding the establishment of a relationship. These stages are accompanied with exhortation or denunciation by those in a position of responsibility to confront the erring believer (2 Thess 2:15, Gal 2:11).

It is to be noted that the passages studied have been addressed to specific local churches and the problem within them. Questions arise regarding error on the part of other church groups or Christian leaders outside the individual's local church. The principles of separation remain the same, and the two stages of action are to be carried out. However, the emphasis is on avoiding the establishment of fellowship rather than on breaking off such a relationship. Likewise, confrontation aimed at restoration cannot be carried out due to the lack of opportunity to do so. The various levels of fellowship between believers need to be observed.²

¹Welch, "Does Biblical Separation Destroy Christian Unity?" p. 14.

²Pickering, *Biblical Separation*, pp. 218-19; John C. Whitcomb, "Biblical Fundamentalism" Course syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d., p. 22.

It is observed from the meaning of separation that it is not always a matter of avoiding. That is, separation is first a state which is usually followed by an action. False doctrine, disorderliness, or devisiveness are the wedges that create the separation. The action that follows is the external recognition of that state. Believers can attempt to be united even though they are, from a spiritual point of view, separated from each other.

The doctrine of separation is further defined by its goals. It is to be practiced for the benefit of both the offender and the sincere believer. The needs of each are not to be minimized. However, they must be kept in the proper perspective.

The benefit of separation, for the sincere believer, is maintenance of the priority of doctrine. This is demonstrated by Paul's response to the Galatians. It did not matter who brought a false doctrine or what falsehood they brought, they were anathema (1:8-9). The majority of the epistle is given over to correcting the false by stressing the true. Likewise, in Romans the priority of what they had been taught is to be maintained against divisions and hindrances.

Another benefit for the sincere believer is the maintenance of the purity of the visible church, including his own purity. Paul exhorted the Galatians to restore their unity with him by removing the error from their doctrinal statement. The Thessalonians were to avoid the disorderly in order to keep their church pure. The church in Rome needed to heed the admonitions in order to maintain their testimony of obedience (16:19). It is not selfish, but only wise to look to oneself in order to avoid being tempted (Gal 6:1).

The goal of separation for the erring believer is restoration. Paul spoke to the issue in Galatians to restore their fellowship with him (4:16, 19-20). By not associating with the disobedient, the Thessalonians would put them to shame. In turn this shame would result in their restoration. It is to be noted that the shame which results in obedience can only be caused by separation. Regarding them as fellow believers is essential. There is a big difference in how one views an enemy, such as the ones designated by that term in the New Testament, and how one treats an erring believer. The recognition of his need for restoration must not be ignored. Welch states, "as far as possible keep a door open for those struggling within a compromise situation yet sincerely seeking a Scriptural position and fellowship."¹

Both sides of separation need to receive its benefits. A consideration of these goals lends support to the tenets of separation. In the final analysis, truth cannot be perpetuated by compromise. Separation stands as the antidote of compromise.

The compromise of inclusivism causes the disunity of true believers in spite of visible unity among certain professing believers. Separation restores fellowship by emphasizing truth which is the center of fellowship, shaming the erring believer, and stopping devious false doctrine within a church fellowship.

Conclusion

From the consideration of these three passages of Scripture and the deductions drawn from them it is concluded that the Word of God teaches separation from other believers because of doctrinal error and

¹Welch, "Does Biblical Separation Destroy Christian Unity?" p. 14.

disobedience to sound teaching. A survey of the tenets of inclusivism and separatism reveals the need for the principles of separation to be implemented today. Inclusivism cannot be supported by Scripture. The tenets of separation must be maintained.

It is a sobering task to consider the need and the procedure for taking action against brothers and sisters in the Lord. There is no room for a judgmental motive or attitude of superiority. By God's grace a spirit of love and genuine concern for other believers can prevail.

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