

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SEPARATION

### **TEXT: II TIMOTHY 2:16—23**

#### **Introduction:**

1. I want to speak tonight on the doctrine of separation. Second Corinthians 6:17 and 18 says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."
2. Ephesians 5:11 says, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."
3. The Bible teaches that Christians must separate from sin and false doctrine, and from those who engage in sinful behaviour, and from those who teach false doctrine. Note these words:
  - shun (2:16) – avoid; to turn one’s back on
  - depart (2:19) – separate from iniquity
  - purge (2:21) – to cleanse thoroughly
  - flee (2:22) – run from it!
  - Avoid (2:23) – refuse; decline
4. The apostle Paul sent Timothy to help out at the church at Ephesus, and he was there when the two epistles to Timothy were written.
5. It is not clear that Timothy ever was the pastor of the church in Ephesus, though he may have been.
6. We know from Acts 20:17 that there were elders (pastors) in Ephesus before Timothy got there.
7. You may recall Paul’s warning about “grievous wolves” entering into the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:29—31).
8. Unfortunately there are many wolves in sheep’s clothing around today, but there are not many preachers warning Christians about them.
9. There are two vital activities missing in churches today – soulwinning and separation. After people are won to Christ they should be taught the doctrine of separation.

#### **I. SHUN PROFANE & VAIN BABBLINGS (2:16—18).**

1. “But shun profane and vain babblings...” (cf. I Tim. 6:20), because they lead to “more ungodliness.” Doctrinal error and immorality are closely linked together. You cannot separate creed and conduct.

2. In order to shun profane and vain babblings, you must shun profane and vain babblers!
3. Albert Barnes said, "Their tendency is to alienate the soul from God, and to lead to impiety. Such kinds of disputation are not merely a waste of time, they are productive of positive mischief. A man fond of contention in religious things is seldom one who has much love for the practical duties of piety, or any very deep sense of the distinction between right and wrong. You will not usually look for him in the place of prayer, nor can you expect his aid in the conversion of sinners, nor will you find that he has any very strict views of religious obligation."
4. Romans 16:17 says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."
5. *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* defines the word "profane" (2:16) this way: Irreverent to any thing sacred; A man is profane when he takes the name of God in vain, or treats sacred things with abuse and irreverence; Irreverent; proceeding from a contempt of sacred things, as profane words or language; profane swearing; Not sacred; secular; relating to secular things; as profane history; Polluted; not pure; Not purified or holy; allowed for common use; as a profane place; Obscene; heathenish; tending to bring reproach on religion; as profane fables; Profane is used chiefly in Scripture in opposition to holy, or qualified ceremonially for sacred services.
6. *Strong's Concordance* says "vain babblings" (2:16) means, "empty discussion, discussion of vain and useless matters."
7. A "canker" (2:17) is a spreading sore like cancer or gangrene; it is a disease in which bacteria enters a wound or injury and destroys the body. Therefore, if false teachers are allowed to enter our churches, their corrupt doctrine will spread and contaminate those that are unspiritual, untaught, and unsuspecting.
8. Sadly, I have seen this time and time again.

9. "Hymenaeus and Philetus" (2:17) are two such "vain babblers." We know nothing about Philetus, but Hymenaeus is referred to in I Timothy 1:20.
10. The false teachers were "saying that the resurrection is past already" (2:18). Denial of the resurrection is a mark of the religious cults.
11. In Paul's day, the cult of Gnosticism was spreading, particularly in Ephesus, the very place where Timothy was ministering.
12. The Gnostics denied the resurrection of the body. Like false teachers today, they taught a so-called spiritual resurrection.
13. Today the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Christ was raised from the dead as "an immortal spirit person," and then Jehovah God dissolved his physical body into gases.
14. Denial of the resurrection is also a mark of liberalism (or modernism). Recently, Washington D.C. Episcopal Bishop said that she did not believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. She is an apostate.
15. There are various ways people deny the resurrection. Some, like the JW's, talk of a so-called "spiritual resurrection," but spirits cannot be resurrected – only bodies can be resurrected.
16. Some "spiritualize" or allegorize resurrection to mean whatever they want it to mean. False teachers promote a "Christianity" without the supernatural.
17. These false teachers are dangerous because they "overthrow the faith of some" (2:18).

## **II. DEPART FROM INIQUITY (2:19, 20).**

1. "Nevertheless" – despite false teachers, religious confusion, devilish deceptions, and other wickedness, "the foundation of God standeth sure."
2. Whatever has been established by God Himself will endure in spite of apostasy. "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).
3. Paul frequently uses the metaphor of a building to represent the church. Paul said in I Timothy 3:15, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of

God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

4. Cf. I Cor. 3:9—11; Eph. 2:19—22).
5. The “seal” of God (2:19) – this means we are owned by God, and “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” In Numbers 16:5, Moses said to Korah and the rebels who followed him, "Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy."
6. A seal is a mark of ownership as well as an emblem of guarantee and security.
7. “And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2:19). In other words, we must be separated from sin and separated unto God.
8. Those professing to be Christians prove the reality of their profession by lives characterized by holiness and godliness.
9. Both aspects of our salvation are revealed here: From God’s perspective we are “sealed” (cf. II Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).
10. We are owned by God and we are known by God. This gives us assurance of salvation and security.
11. Vance Havner said, "'The Lord knoweth them that are his' (II Timothy 2:19), and I am glad that He does, otherwise some of them would be pretty hard to identify!"
12. Jesus said in John 10, "I...know my sheep... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:14, 27).
13. We are those “that nameth the name of Christ.” Therefore, we must “depart from iniquity” (2:19).
14. In this context, “a great house” does not refer to the true church of Jesus Christ but to what is generally called “Christendom,” that great mass of professing believers, some who are saved and some who are not saved.
15. Vessels “of wood and of earth (clay)” refer to unbelievers, and in light of verses 16—19, false teachers in particular (cf. Romans 9:21—23).
16. To be an honorable vessel, the Christian must stay clean. Vessels of wood and clay are eventually discarded, but those of gold and silver are retained as valuable.

### **III. PURGE OURSELVES FROM FALSE DOCTRINE (2:21).**

1. “Purge himself from these” (2:21) means to separate from sin and false doctrine. I was listening to a secular radio program one day and I heard a radio listener call in to correct the radio broadcaster

for not rebuking a politician when he was wrong, even though this broadcaster has been outspoken in his criticisms of others.

2. The radio broadcaster (an unsaved Jewish man) said that he realized the caller was right, but that he could not say anything critical of this particular politician because they were friends. The caller and the broadcaster then both agreed that it was very difficult to take a stand against someone when you are friendly with them.
3. My point: many Christians are compromising with the truth and disobeying God because they have put themselves in a difficult position. Some preachers will not preach against sin and error because they have compromised themselves. They are associating with the wrong crowd.
4. Ephesians 5:11 says, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."
5. The words "purge" and "sanctified" (2:21) refer to separation to God, and separation from all that is not of God.
6. Guy King wrote, "Such a separation does not mean that a Christian has got to be stand-offish, and aloof, and a bad 'mixer.' Was ever a man more friendly to all and sundry than 'the Man Christ Jesus'? Yet Hebrews 7:26 describes Him as 'separate from sinners,' He Himself, in the course of His prayer for us, said, 'These are in the world...they are not of the world' (John 17:11, 16) -- in it, but not of it...We are not to make a friend of the world: that would, according to James 4:4, be clear enmity against God. Not friends, but friendly; and, with all our friendliness, free of all in them, and in their life and behaviour which is not of God" (*An Expository Study of II Timothy*).

#### **IV. FLEE ALSO YOUTHFUL LUSTS (2:22).**

1. Not only was Timothy to separate himself from wicked men, but he was also to separate himself from "youthful lusts." We are living in a pornographic society. It takes great effort to keep ourselves clean and undefiled.
2. "Flee" (2:22). First Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee fornication."
3. Genesis 39:13 says Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife.
4. Spurgeon said, "If you subject yourself to carnal temptations and fleshly lusts, remember it is almost certain that you will be overcome by them."

5. Albert Barnes said, "It is an elementary principle in the true church, that all who become members of it should lead holy lives."
6. In the Christian life, there are both negative commands ("flee") as well as positive commands ("follow").
  - "righteousness" – as Christians we should be known for our honesty, justice, and fairness.
  - "faith" – constant dependence upon God -- every minute, every hour, every day.
  - "charity" – love for others as well as love for God.
  - "peace" – getting along with others, harmony and compatibility.
7. Timothy was warned to separate himself from the unsaved (negative), and here he is told to associate himself "with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." This is positive.
8. This is why it is very important to be a member of a good local church.

#### **V. AVOID FOOLISH AND UNLEARNED QUESTIONS (2:23).**

1. Once again, Paul warns Timothy to avoid "foolish and unlearned questions" (2:23; cf. 2:16).
2. The word "foolish" means "dull and stupid." The same word is used by Paul in Titus 3:9, "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain."
3. "Unlearned" means "ignorant."
4. Unfortunately, too many Christians waste precious time arguing over nonessentials and strange and controversial teachings (cf. I Tim. 4:7).
5. This is nothing but foolishness.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

1. Certain people complain when a preacher exposes false doctrine and false teachers, but this is one of his main responsibilities. We must feed the sheep, and we must also protect the sheep from the wolves.
2. Augustus Strong said, the preacher's "chief intellectual qualification must be the power clearly and comprehensively to conceive, and accurately and powerfully to express, the truth. He can be the agent of the Holy Spirit in converting and sanctifying men, only as he can wield 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Eph. 6:17), or, in other language, only as he can impress truth upon the minds and

consciences of his hearers. Nothing more certainly nullifies his efforts than confusion and inconsistency in his statements of doctrine. His object is to replace obscure and erroneous conceptions among his hearers by those which are correct and vivid.”