

SEPARATION OR MOTIVATION?

By Dr. Richard Flanders

When preachers began violating Biblical principles by their new approaches to evangelism, fundamentalists rightly protested. Billy Graham was wrong to yoke up with apostates. The “church growth” movement is misguided in using worldly entertainment to attract crowds. Those who bend their doctrine to suit the times are wrong to do such a thing. The issue has been *separation* from false doctrine, worldly practices, and evil in general. But now we are hearing voices that say the compromising brethren are wrong about their *motivation* as well as in their lack of separation. The goals of the “New Evangelicals,” they are saying, have been as wrong as their methods. Evangelists can be too passionate about reaching the masses. Churches can give evangelism too great an importance. Glorifying God is really the only legitimate goal of preachers and churches, not swelling crowds and getting big numbers of people under the sound of the Gospel. The problem, they say, is much more than disobedience to the Bible teaching about separation. It is the awful “evangelical pragmatism” that has prevailed among Bible believers for over a hundred years, prodding them to do things they ought not to do in order to get the message of salvation to more and more people. Motivation is the problem, they say, not just separation. But in their assertions our brethren have gone too far. An earnest concern to preach the Gospel to “*every creature*” is absolutely legitimate and scriptural. Let us not condemn evangelistic zeal in our efforts at exposing the wrong in religious compromise. Disobedience to God’s plain commands that we be separate from evil is the problem with the “New Evangelicalism.” The passion to win souls is *not* the problem. To give up the goal of reaching every person with the Gospel of Christ would also be disobedience. Fundamentalists must keep an evangelistic motivation while maintaining Biblical separation.

The concept of “separation” is found throughout the Bible. On the first day, “*God divided the light from the darkness*” (Genesis 1:4). God’s people are commanded to separate themselves from sinful works. They must never appear to endorse them.

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” (Ephesians 5:11)

Believers in Christ should not be tied to unbelievers in binding relationships affecting their direction in life.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” (II Corinthians 6:14-15)

After sufficient efforts have been made to correct them, false teachers should be expelled from churches and church fellowships.

“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.” (Titus 3:10)

Christians should not love the ways of this sinful world.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (I John 2:15)

It is clear in the Bible that compromise or cooperation with evil is not an option in the service of the Lord. That’s why it’s wrong to yoke up with the Liberals in evangelistic crusades. That’s why it’s wrong to use sensual music and endorse unholy practices in order to please the crowd in a Gospel service. That’s why it’s wrong to live as the unsaved do in an effort to reach them for Christ. It is a matter of separation. You are never justified in violating Scripture in order supposedly to spread the Gospel more effectively. To do so is counter-productive, patently sinful, and thoroughly offensive to a holy God.

Those who do such things excuse their methods by explaining their motive. They are trying to reach people for Christ. We answer them by saying that it is wrong to disobey one command of God in a supposed attempt to obey another. But some are now saying that reaching people for Christ can in some way be an unworthy goal. It is suggested that the problems among Evangelicals began when they got away from the Calvinistic view of divine sovereignty. God doesn’t want to save everybody anyway, they are saying, and so our emphasis on winning the masses can be unnecessary and dishonoring to God.

What does the Bible say? It says, first of all, that God has called us to tell the Good News of Christ’s salvation to everyone in the world. *“Teach all nations”* (Matthew 28:19). *“Preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15). *“Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations”* (Luke 24:46-47). *“Ye shall be witnesses unto me. . .unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). *“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. . .For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”* (Romans 1:14 and 16).

The Bible also says that God has provided for the salvation of everyone, and truly desires for all men to be saved. *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taken away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). *“We. . .know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world”* (John 4:42). *“God our Saviour. . .will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”* (I Timothy 2:3-4). *“The living God. . .is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe”* (I Timothy 4:10). *“The Lord is. . .not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (II Peter 3:9). *“He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world”* (I John 2:2).

The Bible calls upon believers to make sacrifices and extraordinary efforts to get the Gospel to the masses of lost sinners, and to seek to win great numbers to Christ. *“Compel them to come in”*

(Luke 14:23). *“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together”* (John 4:35-36). *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit”* (John 12:24). *“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples”* (John 15:8). *“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained”* (John 20:21-23). *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ”* (Acts 5:42). *“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4). *“Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 15:15-16). *“To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”* (I Corinthians 9:22). *“I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”* (I Corinthians 10:33).

Christians *should* be motivated to win many souls to Christ. Remember what Paul wrote in II Corinthians 5?

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. . . Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” (Read verses 10 through 21)

Those who would dissuade us from giving evangelism priority in our lives and in our churches argue that glorifying God ought to be our main purpose. Worship, teaching, and evangelism in the church must be simply various ways to glorify God. To give the winning of souls to Christ too much emphasis can be to neglect the glorification of God. The reason compromisers resort to disobedience in their evangelistic programs is that they first confuse their priorities by putting the saving of sinners ahead of glorifying the Lord, some say. In other words, overemphasis on evangelism leads to the giving up of separation from evil. This argument seems logical, but it should be carefully examined.

Is the chief end of man to glorify God? Certainly I Corinthians 10:31 says, *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,”* but is this the highest purpose of man from which all other legitimate purposes must be derived? Jesus said that *“the great commandment”* is *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,*

and with all thy mind” (See Matthew 22:35-38). But is *loving* God more important or less important than *glorifying* God? Is either of these holy purposes the ultimate purpose of man or of the church?

We find the answer to our question about the chief purpose of man in the Book of Revelation. As Bible students have long noted, many of the great questions generated by Genesis are not fully answered until Revelation. Read what the heavenly beings say as they worship God in Revelation 4:11.

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Everything was created for God’s pleasure—to *please God*. This is the ultimate purpose of man from which all other legitimate purposes must flow. We are to do what *pleases* the Lord. We love God because it pleases Him. We glorify God because it pleases Him. We obey the Great Commission and work at getting the Gospel out because it pleases Him. The trouble with making the glorification of God the ultimate purpose is that men are tempted to define for themselves how this purpose is fulfilled. Some pastors feel that Bible exposition, formal music, proper dress, and ecclesiastical separation make their churches ministries that glorify God, whether or not they evangelize their communities. They feel humble and pious because their works are not spectacular or large, but they think glorifying to God. But the purpose of our ministries must be to *please* God! It is pleasing to God that we give Him glory in everything we do, but is it pleasing to God and glorifying of God that we disobey His admonitions to reach and win every sinner we can? Of course it is not. We must please God by obeying Him, by sacrificing to obey, by glorifying His name, and by loving Him with all our hearts.

The problem is not in the motivation to win souls. It is in the abandonment of Biblical separation. Separatists need to stay motivated to preach the Gospel to every creature, and not be discouraged by misguided warnings against giving evangelism too much emphasis. Billy Graham was wrong to join with Liberals, but he was not wrong to seek to reach the masses. Bill Hybels is wrong to use worldliness to draw crowds, but he is not wrong to work at bringing people under the sound of the Gospel. May fundamentalists not give up the right motivation for fear of losing their separation.

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