
Words of Truth

Love Them From Afar

By: Brian A. Yeager

One of the hardest things Christians have to do in life may just be withdrawing ourselves from people we know and love in the flesh. The word of God is very clear in teaching that congregations and individuals have to withdraw from those who err and refuse to repent. Notice: *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican... Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us... If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but dotting about questions and strifes of words, where of cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself... This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away”* (Matthew 18:15-17, II Thessalonians 3:6, I Timothy 6:3-5, and II Timothy 3:1-5).

What makes the instruction to withdraw from the wayward difficult? For many, it is that this instruction includes social interaction. Notice: *“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person”* (I Corinthians 5:9-13). Often, this then becomes a question of whether or not you love God first and foremost or not.

Jesus Makes This A Question Of Love For God

Jesus said: *“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's*

foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:34-37). If one shows preference to loved ones on earth more than the will of God, that person cannot be a disciple of Christ (Luke 14:25-33). Therefore, there may be times wherein all of us are going to have to choose to separate ourselves from people we love and care about in the flesh in accordance with God's will. In this case, our love for that person will have to be from a distance.

Loving Someone From A Distance

There is not a blanket text that applies to withdrawing oneself from the erring. For example, a person who is divisive is to be marked and avoided (Romans 16:17-18) as an enemy of the cross (Philippians 3:18-19). Yet, there are some who err that are not in such a state as others. Consider this context regarding lazy individuals who refused to work: *"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (II Thessalonians 3:10-15).

In all cases of withdrawing from someone, there is a definite distance that is to be between us and them. As you just read, you want that person to feel ashamed. You never want to make evildoers feel justified by your words, actions, relationship with them, etc. (Jeremiah 23:14).

While withdrawing ourselves from the erring has benefits to our salvation, the action is more intended to try and get the erring to repent. We are benefited in that an evil influence, which can cause us to err (I Corinthians 15:33), is away from us. Yet, the shame that the erring should feel is what we'd hope will ultimately bring repentance. Corrective action is an action of real love (Proverbs 27:5 and Revelation 3:19). Thus, while withdrawing has multiple levels of work in place, one thing we are doing is loving that person from afar. It is selfless to give up a relationship for the purpose of helping someone to see the clear message that their actions are wrong.

Conclusion

God is our example (Ephesians 5:1). He has shown an abundance of love towards humanity (Romans 5:6-10 and I John 3:16). When people err, God withdraws Himself from them (Isaiah 59:1-3 and I Peter 3:12). His disgust goes so far that He considers even the prayer of the unfaithful as an abomination (Proverbs 28:9). If people saw this kind of love from us, they'd understand the seriousness of their transgressions. However, if we treat the erring like everything is okay, then we'll be sending them a message that their actions are not all that bad. This is not love. If we want a relationship so bad that we'll allow someone to remain in error, then we're selfish. Real love, for the erring, will be shown from a distance to bring about real change (Jeremiah 31:18-20).