

FULFILLED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN A PAGAN WORLD
"Part III: The Spiritual Dynamics Of A Holy Christian Unity"
(1 Peter 1:14-2:10)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

About six years ago, I attended a prayer breakfast of ministers who habitually gathered together to edify one another in the ministry. They were all true believers in Christ, and it seemed like a good opportunity for fellowship.

After having a good meal, the group got down to business, talking about have some inter-church functions, etc. to bolster fellowship between our various congregations.

One of the newer ministers visiting with the group suddenly began to wax eloquent and loud as though he were a prophet or messenger from God to the Friendly's restaurant that day. He started to preach loudly to the group, being of the persuasion that the sign gifts were for today!

I was shocked as his behavior attracted attention from around the room, and I felt truly embarrassed to be associated with the group! Accordingly, I left as soon as I could unobtrusively bow out, hoping never to be caught in that situation again.

Since then, I have received several letters from the clerk of the group, asking me to join them on other breakfasts. I have sent back replies that I could not as my involvement with it would conflict with our stand as a Church and my own personal beliefs. Undaunted, the letters kept coming for a while until finally they petered out and stopped.

Was I wrong in standing this way against fellow believers in Christ who wanted my fellowship? This question, which we echo in the "Need" section of our sermon has haunted me in years past more than once!

Need: "I am concerned about the issue of unity with others versus separation from their ungodliness! Does God want us to unify with fellow believers even if they violate Scripture? How about contacts with the unsaved, and what are the practical dynamics involved?!"

- I. **God orders the Christian to separate from sin out of fear of certain, severe divine judgment for NOT doing so!**
 - A. God commands believers to be holy as He is holy, 1 Peter 1:15-16. This quality means separation from sin, see v. 14.
 - B. In keeping with this call to holiness, we must fear God's judgment for **not** doing so, 17-21.
 1. God judges **every** work of **every** person, making the believer aware of his need to live consistently without sin, 1 Peter 1:17.
 2. Since God redeemed believers with the precious death of His Son, they must live without sin or invoke the wrath of One Who highly values the price paid to **purify** them, 1:18-21!
- II. **This call to holiness bears a twofold assignment in relationships:**
 - A. **On the one hand, we must long to unite with other believers as God our Judge orders us to love them fervently:**
 1. One of God's commands toward sinless living is that believers love one another **fervently**, 1 Pet. 1:22 with John 15:12, 17.
 2. Peter reveals the way believers accomplish this in spite of their sinful weaknesses in 1 Peter 1:23-2:5:
 - a. The basis of the believer's new **birth** in Christ is his faith in the Gospel, part of God's Word, 1 Peter 1:23-25.
 - b. Accordingly, the believer's new **life** is sustained by constant use of Scripture, 1 Peter 2:2.
 - c. As he uses Scripture, the believer's life develops into a mutual unity with other maturing believers, 1 Pet. 2:4-5.
 - d. Thus, the believer puts aside his grudges, deceit, hypocrisy and slander in relating to other believers by applying Scripture in his life, 1 Pet. 2:1-2, cf. Trench, Syn. of the N.T., p. 38; Arndt & Gingrich, A Gr.-En. Lex., p. 202, 852 & 413.
 - e. **He does so out of regard for God's judgment**, 1:22a,b!
 - B. **Conversely, God's command for separation from sin requires we modify relating in unity based upon the other party's separation from sin (as follows):**
 1. *Certain unbelievers are off limits for fellowship:
 - a. If a party tries to present beliefs that deny the Incarnation, we must avoid all fellowship with them, 2 John 9-11.

- b. We must depart from abusive unbelievers, 2 T. 3:1-5.
2. *Certain believers are off limits for fellowship: Christians who are guilty of excommunication offenses are utterly outside of a godly one's fellowship, 1 Cor. 5:11; Tit. 3:10.
3. *Certain believers are partially outside of a godly one's union:
 - a. When a believer disobeys Scripture, the godly must partially withdraw to motivate him to repent, 2 Thes. 3:14f.
 - b. When fellow believers become abusive as described in 2 Tim. 3:1-5a, for self-protection (middle voice), we are to withdraw to the degree required for the protection, 5b!
4. There is an **exception** for the previous points marked by an asterisk (*). Family members of such a party must still relate to him, carefully making contact to protect the weak, 1 T. 5:8; 2 T. 3:5.
5. **He does so out of regard for God's judgment**, 1 P. 1:16f!

Application: *To deal with difficult questions of unity versus holiness, we must (1) believe on Christ for salvation from sin, 1 Pet. 1:18; Jn. 3:16. (2) As believers, all must (a) confess any personal sins for purification (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) depend upon the indwelling Holy Spirit for behavior control, Gal. 5:16-23. (c) Then, each believer should recognize that Almighty God judges every action he takes in relating to others so that it is in his own personal interests to heed God's will in relating, 1 Pet. 1:17-22a. (d) When facing questions of uniting with others or separating for holiness' sake, believers **THEN** must seek to preserve **BOTH** their love and their holiness with **BOTH** God **AND** man to relate effectively to the glory of God. This means that compromising one or the other quality by either unifying or separating, we must modify our stand to the degree demanded in the Word of God to meet the demands of One Who will judge every union and separation in righteousness!!*

Lesson: *If we preserve the love and sinlessness of fellowship with God in uniting with a party, we unite. If we compromise one or the other quality by either unity or separation, we must modify our stand as Scripture demands to meet the demands of God, our Judge!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon's lesson . . .)

An issue arose with the recent successful musical presentation by Joy, Inc. that is worth using here as an illustration.

After plans were well under way to have the group come to Nepaug, a difference arose between the leader of Joy, Inc. and our stand on how the offering was to be taken for the ministry!

Influence the congregation to give **enough** to make the trip cost-effective!

Me to speak with the leader of Joy, Inc. **directly** and iron it out!!

To say the least, I felt uncomfortable! I knew that we couldn't change our method of taking the offering as our stand had influenced people to join Nepaug, and changing our method would harm the consciences of others in violation of 1 Cor. 8:13! On the other hand, I did not relish cancelling the musical due to the potentially harmful effects a cancellation would have on the many relationships involved!

WHAT COULD I DO?!

A believer at Nepaug Church who knew of our plight and who felt responsible before God to exhibit love and holiness before the Lord came up with a solution! Though he really didn't have the funds to spend, he wrote out a personal check for \$100.00 and sent it along with a letter from me to the leader of Joy, Inc. We thus insured the cost-effectiveness of the Joy, Inc. ministry without passing the offering plate! Accordingly, the leader of Joy, Inc. agreed to come, and the ministry went off without a crisis!

This kind of behind-the-scenes drama is par for the course here at Nepaug. Over the years, the Lord has used devout, God-fearing believers in our midst to "bail out the body" by bearing the cost and the pain needed in relating to others to adhere both to the love and the holiness of Almighty God! That's how it works, and that is how we as a body can please a God Who will judge us on our love and holiness!