

Avoid Wicked Friends

One of the teachings of the Bible is that Christians are commanded to distance themselves from heretics:

Titus 3:10-11: A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."

If someone is teaching false doctrine, the Biblical thing to do is to distance ourselves from that person. We're also commanded to avoid those who claim to be Christians but are living sinful lives:

1 Corinthians 5:11: "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 idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat."

This commandment is pretty clear. If someone claims to be a fellow Christian but is living an openly sinful life, then we must not keep company with that person.

There are two reasons why we must do this. The first is because being around such people is corrupting:

1 Corinthians 5:6-8: "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of

malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

The Bible doesn't teach that when righteous people are around wicked people, it encourages the wicked people to behave. Instead it teaches that being around wicked people encourages the righteous to sin. It can be easy for someone who spends a lot of time around an evildoer to begin to accept their sin and even stop seeing it as sinful (especially if the sins are being committed by a fellow Christian). From there it's only a short step to committing those very same sins.

The second reason is so that those who are living sinful lives might be ashamed of what they're doing and repent:

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15: “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.”

That's the principle for dealing with Christians who are living in open sin. They must be admonished and avoided so that they might be ashamed of their sin and repent.

What about those who are living sinful lives who are *not* Christians? The Bible speaks about this as well. We're told that our friends should be wise, not fools:

Proverbs 13:20: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

We're also commanded to distance ourselves from the wicked and have nothing to do with their evil deeds:

Psalms 101:3-7: “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that

turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

The basic teaching is simple: our companions should be wise and godly people, not foolish and wicked people. If we're around wicked people then we may be tempted to tolerate wickedness or become wicked ourselves. We have to be careful about who we choose to spend time with.

That being said, it's true that Jesus was the friend of sinners and spent a lot of time with them:

Matthew 11:19: "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children."

Jesus was indeed a friend of sinners! He showed His love for them by healing them (Matthew 4:23), by feeding them (Matthew 14:19-20), and by commanding them to repent so that they might be saved:

Matthew 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus didn't tolerate sin. Instead He commanded people to go and sin no more:

John 5:14: "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

John 8:11: "She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

It's entirely right and proper to preach the gospel to those who don't know God. It's a wonderful thing to meet their needs by feeding them, clothing them, and healing them. The Bible is full of commands to care for the poor and needy:

Proverbs 19:17: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."

Proverbs 22:9: "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."

Proverbs 28:27: "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."

Matthew 19:21: "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

However, this *never* means tolerating their sin. Jesus helped unbelievers, but He also preached the gospel to them and commanded them to repent. He didn't just accept them as they were and leave them in that sinful and lost state! Instead He

commanded them to repent so that they might be saved from God's wrath.

We're not commanded to live alone in the desert so that we might be free from all wicked influences. Instead we're commanded to seek and save them which are lost. The disciples didn't avoid the wicked; instead they went out into the world to find them and preach to them.

But that's altogether different from being a close companion to them. The Bible says that being a companion to the wicked is more than just a bad idea. It's an act of disobedience:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18: "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? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 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."

This passage is often referred to when discussing marriage, but it actually doesn't mention marriage at all. Its teaching is far more generic than that. The righteous *cannot* have fellowship with the unrighteous! It's impossible. This is true within marriage, but it's also true outside of marriage. God commands us to be separate and distinct from the wicked, and that *must* impact the relationships we have with them.