



What Does It Mean To Be “Withdrawn” From?

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What does it mean to be “withdrawn” from? The New Testament gives Christians the responsibility to withdraw themselves from those who are living in sin and are unwilling to repent. But, what does that mean for the one who is being withdrawn from? Although you may view it as being harsh and unloving, the Bible actually commends this action to us as one of love. Let’s consider what it means to be withdrawn from.

It Means That You Are Living In Sin

There is only one reason that Christian brethren should withdraw from anyone. Withdraw is not an action prescribed by God for when there is personal animosity between individuals. Nor is it prescribed by God when there are disagreements. Instead, it is only prescribed by God whenever sin is present.

For instance, Matthew 18:15-17 speaks of a situation in which one brother sins against another. Jesus says that the brother who has been sinned against must go to the one who has sinned and tell him his fault privately. But, if the one who is guilty of sin still will not repent, he must take one or two more to the one who is in sin. Still, if he will not repent, it must be told to the church.

Another passage commanding withdraw is 1 Corinthians 5. The entire passage begins with the identification of the man’s sin in verse 1: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father’s wife!” Here was a man living in fornication/adultery – and the people around him knew it. The seriousness of this man’s sinful condition was such that the brethren should withdraw from him.

Then, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul commands that brethren be withdrawn from who walk (live) “disorderly and not according to the tradition he received from us.” Verse 14 teaches that

such a one who does not obey the instructions in Scripture (specifically in the letter Paul wrote, but applicable to all Scripture) must be withdrawn from.

So, you must recognize that if you are withdrawn from, it indicates that you have been judged by your brethren to be living in sin and are unwilling to repent of it. Although it is possible that brethren can make incorrect judgments, usually the matter of withdraw is taken very seriously and is only done when there is clear evidence that an individual is living in sin and is unwilling to repent.

Therefore, if you are withdrawn from, you should recognize a couple things. First, you are the one who brought this situation on yourself. It is unfair for you to blame or criticize your brethren for doing what God instructs them to do. Instead, you are the one who has caused the entire situation – because you have decided to live to please yourself rather than God. Second, your greater problem is with God. The consequences of being withdrawn from pale in comparison to the consequences of being separated from God whenever you are in sin. For, if you die in such a sinful condition, you will be eternally separated from God and receive the eternal punishment of Hell fire and brimstone (see Revelation 21:8).

It Means That You Will Be Identified As An Erring Christian

Whenever you are living in sin and are withdrawn from, your brethren have the responsibility to identify you as an erring Christian rather than to act as if you are faithful to Jesus Christ. Consider a few passages.

In Matthew 18:17, Jesus taught concerning the one who had sinned and was unwilling to repent. In this situation (after refusing to repent when corrected by his/her brethren), the matter was to be told before the church. And, if the individual refuses even to hear the church so as to repent, such a person is to become “like a heathen and a tax collector.” The idea in this is that such a person is clearly marked as living in sin.

In 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, Paul gave the following instructions concerning the man who had his father’s wife, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” Giving an unrepentant sinner over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh is to mark him/her as living for Satan rather than Christ. It is to give him/her over to the life of sin that he/she insists upon living.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:14, the one who would not keep the instructions Paul had outlined in the letter was to be noted. That is, he/she was to have a distinguishing mark put on his/her name. This mark directly corresponded with the fact that he/she was living in sin. Therefore, whenever you are withdrawn from, brethren should be made aware that you are an erring Christian.

It Means That Your Relationship Will Change With Other Christians

The bond between Christian brothers and sisters ought to be very close. Certainly, from a spiritual perspective, they are in fellowship with one another as they share in the spiritual blessings God has provided through Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:5-7). Then, this spiritual bond ought to result in brethren being close on a physical level and interacting with one another regularly. For instance, the early Christians in Acts 2 were together with one another daily, even sharing physical meals together (see verse 46).

Whenever a Christian goes back into sin and is unwilling to repent, these relationships change on both the spiritual and physical levels. On the spiritual level, the fellowship in Christ Jesus is severed by the sin. For instance, 1 John 1:5-7 teaches that when two individuals are walking in the light (according to God's righteousness), they are in fellowship with God. Therefore, they are brought into fellowship with each other. However, the implication is that if one of those two walks in darkness (contrary to God's righteousness), that fellowship with God is broken – which also severs the spiritual fellowship with other Christians.

Then, on a physical level, God commands Christians to withdraw themselves socially from those Christians who insist on living in sin. Once again, Jesus' command that such a one be like a heathen and tax collector (Matthew 18:17) implies that such a one no longer enjoys the same kind of relationship with other Christians. Then, the point is directly made in both 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul says, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people" (verse 10). Verse 11 states, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person." Such an evil person is to be "put away" from among the brethren (verse 13). Then, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, these erring Christians are to be withdrawn from. This means that they are not to be associated with. Verse 14 instructs that Christians "do not keep company with" such an erring brother.

While God permits Christians to talk with those who are erring to try and bring them back to Him, these passages indicate that the relationship between them has been destroyed by the sin that has been committed. Spiritually, there is no more fellowship. And, physically, the social kind of relationship must also be cut off – to the point that they are not even permitted to share a meal together!

It Means That Your Brethren Love You

While all of this might seem very mean-spirited to you, God has no such thing in His mind whenever He commands such. In fact, it is quite the opposite. One of the main purposes of this kind of withdraw is so that the one who is living in sin will return to the Lord so that his/her soul will be saved eternally! Therefore, it is an act of love on the part of your brethren by demonstrating that they care for your soul so much that they are willing *not* to have the same kind of relationship with you that they once enjoyed – so long as you are living in your sin. Please recognize, then, that

you are not the only one who has lost this relationship. Recognize that your brethren have lost both their physical and spiritual relationship with you – because of the choice that **you** have made to persist in sin!

Recall that your brethren are to deliver you to Satan for the destruction of your flesh, so that your “spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 also indicates that this withdraw is so that you will “be ashamed” and return to the Lord. Yet, your brethren must not count you as an “enemy,” but admonish you as a “brother.” So, the action that is taken by your brethren is all in your best interest. Whenever you persist to live in sin, it is the only action that they can take to try to pull you back to Jesus Christ!

It Means That You Are A Threat To The Purity Of Other Christians

Whenever you determine to leave Christ and return to a life of sin, you do not just put your own soul in danger. Instead, you put all of your brothers and sisters in danger. If they do not mark you as an erring Christian and take the steps that they are required to take, your sinful influence in their lives can work to desensitize them to sin and pull them away from Christ.

The church in Corinth was experiencing this. Although they knew of the sin that had been committed by the man who had his father’s wife, they were “puffed up” (boastful, proud) about it rather than mourning the sin. Paul told them, “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). So, when Christians withdraw from erring Christians, they do so both for the good of those who are erring and to help themselves remain pure from sin!

Conclusion

The Bible commands Christians to withdraw from erring Christians. This is a display of love for the soul of the one who is living for sin. Such a one is in danger of eternal punishment in Hell. But, know that even after being withdrawn from, an erring sinner can still return to the Lord. Such a one must repent of his/her sin, confess the sin to God, ask God for forgiveness, and confess his/her sin before the brethren who are aware of the sin (see Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16).

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