

The Company We Keep

Rick Railston

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One quote I have heard all my life – I've heard it from my Dad and from older relatives, and I'm sure you've heard it too: "A man [or woman] is known by the company he [she] keeps". George Washington, when he was president, said, "Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your reputation, for it is better to be alone than in bad company.", and boy that is true! The company we keep is important and it doesn't make a difference if we're a grade school kid or a high school kid or a college student, or at work, or frankly, in the church. The understanding of the company we keep and what affect it has on us is very, very important. As an old guy, I think I'm second oldest here or maybe third oldest in the group, I've learned again over the last couple of years, the validity of this truth.

So what we want to do today is look into God's word and to see what it has to say about the company that we keep. It is very important. God has a lot to say about it and God is very concerned about it and obviously we should be too.

The first point I'd like to make is very obvious in the scriptures:

- 1. Your companions and the environment they create does have an influence on each one of us.**

The individual human beings that we associate with and the environment that is created in their presence has an influence on all of us. God warns us in His word that the company we keep will influence us either to do good or to do evil. This is why parents are so concerned about their children and who they run around with – it's very important. Dorothy and I watched our son Brett like a hawk because you don't want your children to be lead astray. It's very, very important. Look at Exodus 23 and the beginning of verse 2.

Christ, the God of the Old Testament, inspired this and we need to take heed to it, because you can't follow the crowd. You can't follow the herd. Sometimes that will get you into trouble.

Exodus 23:2 - You shall not follow a multitude to do evil...

And sometimes you're in a crowd – it could be teenagers getting together, high school students getting together – and somebody comes up with a brilliant idea of throwing a brick through a glass window. It's easy to go along with the herd and you get yourself

into trouble. And of course ancient Israel was warned that they were not to follow the nations around them. Let's go to Deuteronomy 12 and verse 30.

Christ again was saying to the ancient Israelites that they had to be careful with whom they associated with and the environment that they find themselves in, to watch over, be very careful, so that you don't follow a multitude to do evil.

Deuteronomy 12:30 - Take heed to yourself that you be not snared following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.

It's the herd mentality – following those around you. And we've all been in situations where we've been caught in something – not really thinking about it – and then we follow the herd to do something that we later regret. We have to be very, very careful about that. That can apply to the group, but it also can apply individually. Look at Proverbs 22 and verse 24.

This is talking about one individual with another individual. We're warned here to be very careful about with whom we make a friend.

Proverbs 22:24 - Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man you shall not go...

It's obvious why – if you make friends with people who are angry, who have a chip on their shoulder, who have a very short fuse, it's only a matter of time before something happens. They get upset with somebody, they start a fight, they start yelling and screaming, they get into some kind of argument, and you're swept up in it! And now all of a sudden, you're in a situation that you hadn't planned on. Also, over time, what we find out, is if you partner with an angry person – hopefully it's not in marriage – over time, that will have an influence on you as an individual and you run the danger that you can become, over months and years, an angry person yourself. Or it could be a crass person, or somebody that is lukewarm, or somebody that is worldly – the same thing can happen. So God is warning us to be very careful who our friends are. Very careful when we evaluate our friends, much less a mate or somebody that we are going to entertain the idea of marriage with down the road.

If we don't obey this principle, we will become leavened with their sins. We have to be careful about that. We will become leavened. Look at II John and we'll read verses 9 through 11.

Notice what the bible tells us – if we associate with the wrong group or the wrong individuals, we can become part of their sins and part of their problems.

II John 9 - Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son.

I love John's writings because he is very simple and very direct. Short sentences – bam, bam, bam, he makes the point. Now, verse 10:

II John 10 - If anybody comes unto you, and doesn't bring this doctrine, don't receive him into your house, neither bid him God speed:

This is a person who has not God, and doesn't abide in the doctrine of Christ. Verse 11:

II John 11 - For he that bids him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.

So what John is telling us, through the inspiration of Christ, is that if we associate with sinners, and I'm not talking rubbing shoulders, or coworkers out in the world, but if we associate with someone who is sinning, then we eventually ultimately become partakers of their sins, and we have to be very careful about that. Let's jump back to Ephesians chapter 5. Here's a warning to the church in Ephesus which applies to us today. Ephesians 5, and we're going to read verses 6 and 7. Here's a warning about not being deceived, as brethren.

Ephesians 5:6 - Let no man deceive you with vain words...

That means empty words, words with no value.

Ephesians 5:6 - ...for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

Be careful about associating with people who are disobedient.

Ephesians 5:7 - Be you not therefore partakers with them.

Meaning, if you associate with them, in the sense of a close association where they can have an influence over you, ultimately you can be partakers of their disobedience because of their influence over you. We have to be very careful about that.

As I said, if we don't obey this principle, we will become leavened with their leaven. Notice I Corinthians 5 where Paul talks about that. The Corinthian church had all kinds of problems, all kinds of divisions, they weren't keeping the Passover properly, they didn't even understand the role of men and women properly, they had marriage problems and so on. I Corinthians 5 and we're going to read verse 6 and then jump down to verses 9 through 11, and I'm going to read this out of the NIV as it's a little clearer.

I Corinthians 5:6 - Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?
(NIV)

And the cooks amongst us understand that. You put a little bit of leaven in and it's only a matter of time before it permeates the whole batch of dough. Paul is using this on purpose to draw a conclusion. Verse 9:

I Corinthians 5:9 - I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people...
(NIV)

Now this was the letter that was not canonized that was written before I Corinthians. We don't have a record of that today, but he is reminding them, apparently they were associating with those sexually immoral in their conduct. He goes on in verse 10:

I Corinthians 5:10 - But, I am not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral or greedy or swindlers or idolaters, in that case you would have to leave this world.
(NIV)

So he is talking about brethren in the church, or close personal friends. He is not talking about coworkers on the job because he said if we put that restriction on everybody then we would have to come out of the world and we would all live in a commune. We use this scripture to prove to ourselves through God's word that we shouldn't do that – that he meant for us to live in the world and face the problems in the world, but be very careful who we associate with. Verse 11:

I Corinthians 5:11 - But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother...
(NIV)

And he's leaving room that this person may or may not be converted.

I Corinthians 5:11 - ...who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy or an idolater or a slanderer or a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.
(NIV)

That is an admonition that we can't ignore. The reason for it is that you don't want to be a casualty of somebody else's sins. Because if you associate, over time their attitudes, their approaches, their beliefs, their deeds, their thoughts, will have an effect. Paul is warning them, it is not going to be a happy, positive effect – it's going to be a negative effect. So if somebody calls themselves a brother and yet has these sins, and he's not

talking an occasional slip up where somebody screws up and then they're sorry, but has a pattern in their life – we cannot associate with them on a regular basis. We can't, in order to avoid having their sins pollute us as he was drawing the analogy of leaven going through dough.

So the first point is that our companions, and the environment they create, will have an influence on us, either for good or evil, and we have to be very careful about that.

A second point that we need to consider, and this is really important to our young people – they need to understand this.

2. Separation from a wrong environment is a biblical principle.

The idea of separating one's self from a wrong environment is clearly spelled out in the bible. Now let's go back to the second letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in II Corinthians chapter 6 and we're going to read verses 14 through 17.

Separation from a wrong environment is biblically sound – it is a correct principle. We've heard this before, now let's approach it from this subject about the company that we keep.

II Corinthians 6:14 - Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...

We have to be careful about that.

II Corinthians 6:14 - ...for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?

That should be obvious to all of us.

II Corinthians 6:14 - ...and what communion has light with darkness?

"Communion" means a coming together.

II Corinthians 6:15 - And what concord has Christ with Belial?

"Concord" means a cooperation.

II Corinthians 6:15 - ...or what part has he that believes with an infidel?

He's talking about being yoked together. It was an obvious term that was very familiar to the brethren in those days because they could see two oxen yoked together plowing a field – they would understand that. And their tied together side by side with this giant wooden yoke, and he's saying don't put yourself in that position – be very careful.

Verse 16:

I Corinthians 6:16-17 - And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

V.17 - Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Eternal, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

The context here is infidels, unbelievers – we’re talking about people who are in the world that God has not called, that God is not dealing with. For our young people it is very important because God is dealing with you. If your parents are converted, I Corinthians 7 tells us very clearly that your children are holy in the sense that now they have the opportunity to have a relationship with God and you have to be very careful about associating with people of the wrong moral character. See Psalm 1 and verse 1 – we were there earlier today. Let’s read that again. We’re having a different emphasis that Neil had in the sermonette, but it still applies. Psalm 1 and verse 1.

David is telling us that God will bless someone who approaches this in the right way.

Psalm 1:1 - Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...

Doesn’t walk in their way, doesn’t listen to their counsel, doesn’t act on the counsel of the world or the counsel of infidels, as we read in II Corinthians.

Psalm 1:1 - ...nor stands in the way of sinners...

In other words, puts himself in an environment where it is sinful. That’s why we tend not to go to bars, and not to go to nightclubs, because there is an environment there that is very conducive to sin, and we have to be very careful about that.

Psalm 1:1 - ...nor sits in the seat of the scornful.

What God is telling us, is be very careful of the environment that you put yourself in, because it is going to have an effect on you one way or another. Whether it’s people in the church, out of the church, young, old, it makes no difference. Now let’s jump over to the next book – Proverbs chapter 4, expanding on this idea. Proverbs 4 and we’re going to read verses 14 and 15. This is talking about being very careful about getting into a wrong environment.

Proverbs 4:14 - Enter not into the path of the wicked...

That means the way that they walk. Now we know we’re supposed to follow in Christ’s footsteps, and so how on earth, if we’re supposed to be doing that, can we walk in the path of the wicked?

Proverbs 4:14 - ...and go not in the way of evil men.

Don't follow their example, don't be in their company. Again, we're not talking rubbing shoulder at work, or having to work with coworkers. When Dorothy and I owned our business, I had to travel all week with people in the world, and by your example they quickly learned that you're not going to certain places. You're not going to go to a bar after work, or to a strip club after work, you're not going to do this or that. They don't even bring it up because they know you're not going to go there by reputation. So we are being admonished here that we can't go the way of the wicked, or their path. Verse 15:

Proverbs 4:15 - Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.

Just get away from it – don't even go there! Don't go there. The principle here is that separating ourselves from a wrong environment is biblically encouraged.

Now, let's take an example. The most famous example that you can think of in the scripture is Lot and Sodom. Because you know the two angels came to him as he was sitting in the gate. He said "Turn into my house" and they said, "No we're going to sleep in the city" and he knew that was probably not a good idea and he says, "No, no, no, come into my house" and he twisted their arm and they came into the house. It wasn't long before all the wicked homosexual men gathered around the house and started banging on the door and said "Send these guys out to us because we want to 'know them'" as the King James politely says "know them" – we want to have them. And Lot went out and tried to disabuse them of this notion and they were about ready to kill him, and guess what he did? You remember what he did – he offered his two daughters. Now that is abhorrent to us! But you think, having lived in that environment, he thought that was better than sending these two guys out – angels, which he didn't realize then – but sending these guys out to be abused, instead he offered his two daughters. And they were so perverted that had no interest to them. That was not attractive at all to these creeps – instead they wanted these two men. If you have made a study on angels at all – any time an angel appears they appear generally as young men. My guess is, they are fit young men, probably nice looking young men as they appear, and so these perverts wanted them. Lot had been affected by the environment – he shouldn't have been in Sodom at all. But the fact is, it was to the point that he was willing to offer his daughters.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, that environment can have an effect on us, and that is something that we need to be very careful about. We need to be very careful about what we watch on television, and what we read and put into our minds. As I've said before, the commercials that we see, the ads in magazines that we see, the ads on the side of buses driving down the streets, would have been pornographic 50 years ago. Absolutely pornographic! People would have run away screaming. But now we don't think anything about it. And shame on us – we turn away, but it is still there.

We have to be very, very careful about being corrupted. And Lot was corrupted. As you know, they had to drag him kicking and screaming out of Sodom – he didn't want to go! They wanted him to live on the plain, but no, he wanted to go to Zayor. The fact is, it is obvious, and there's a lesson for us, that Lot, over time, began to be affected in a negative way about the environment that he chose to live in. He didn't have to live in that environment, but he chose it. We have to be very careful about that. Notice I Corinthians 15 and verse 33. I'll read it out of the NIV. This one scripture sums up this whole second point.

I Corinthians 15:33 - Do not be misled...
(NIV)

Paul is saying do not be misled, don't make a mistake, and don't go off in a wrong direction.

I Corinthians 15:33 - ...bad company corrupts good character.
(NIV)

This is so important for our young people. Don't associate with people of bad character because your good character will be polluted or perverted if you associate long enough with them. Be very careful. Bad company corrupts good character. That is why it is so hard for some people to leave an evil environment. As I said, Lot had to be dragged out. He wasn't willing to go – he had to be pulled out. This is why there's a principle that psychological research has revealed over the last several years – primarily researching battered women. They were investigating why battered women keep going back to the man that batters them. He'll beat them up, break bones, and they'll put him in jail and they'll admonish him in some way legally, and then a few months later this woman is right back in there and she gets beat up again and the cycle goes over and over and over. Psychologists began to research this to find out why somebody would do that. They found that something that is bad but is familiar is better than something that is unknown. So these women are facing, apart from this evil man, they're facing an unknown life, an unknown environment. They don't know where they're going to go, what they're going to do. So it is more comfortable for them to go back to somebody that beats them up than to face the unknown. There is something about human nature that you would rather be in a familiar environment, even though it's bad, than to be in an environment that is unknown. It could be scary, it could be challenging, so they will go back to the guy that beats them up. It's just incredible. That's why battered women return to the men that batter them. That is why separation is a Godly principle that people often don't want to do. They don't separate because they want to go back to the familiar and the comfortable. They want to go back to people that they like but have a wrong influence on them. We have to be very careful about that.

Let's go to II Timothy 3, talking about in the last days, and boy we are in the last days! We're very familiar with this, but I want to read it from the standpoint of the company that we keep. II Timothy 3 and verse 1.

II Timothy 3:1 - This know also, that in the last days...

And the Greek word for "last" is Strong's 2078 and it's the Greek word "eschatos" and it's a superlative. It's the extreme use of the word. It means "a final place or time". So this is really at the end, in a superlative sense.

II Timothy 3:1 - ...perilous times shall come.

We're being warned – perilous, scary, dangerous. Now verse 2 – this is the reason it's dangerous.

II Timothy 3:2 - For men [and women] shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

And what have we just been reading about being in an unholy environment, or a blasphemous environment or a wrong environment. Going on in verse 3.

II Timothy 3:3 - Without natural affection...

That word is Strong's 794 and it is the Greek word "astorgos" and it means "hard hearted toward your kindred". Now think about that. Hard hearted toward your blood relatives or to those you associate with – even in the church. Hard hearted toward people in the church, if we put it in a modern environment. That's going to happen – people are going to be hard hearted toward each other. The love of many will wax cold, we are warned. Going on in verse 3.

II Timothy 3:3 - ...trucebreakers...

Meaning people who are not afraid to lie. Not afraid to go back on their commitments – make a promise and it doesn't mean anything. A few days later, a few weeks later, a few months later they've changed their mind – their word doesn't mean anything.

II Timothy 3:3 - ...false accusers...

Boy, we've seen that recently! People accusing other people over something when they weren't there, they didn't see, they know nothing about, and yet people are accused.

II Timothy 3:3 - ...incontinent...

That means without self control.

II Timothy 3:3 - ...fierce, despisers of those that are good,

Running off people that have good hearts, running off people that have converted minds, and that has happened. Verse 4...

II Timothy 3:4 - Traitors, heady, highminded...

That's not a term we use today – highminded. But it's Strongs 5187 and it's the Greek word "tuphoo" and it means "to inflate with self-conceit or to be lifted up with pride". That is a danger in the end days – to be lifted up with pride. To look at ourselves and think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, as the bible says.

II Timothy 3:4 - ...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

In other words, it's more convenient to do this, even though it might go against something that God says in His word.

II Timothy 3:5 - Having a form of godliness...

Meaning on the surface, appearing Godly. Remember what Christ said in the book of Matthew about hypocrites, to the scribes and the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the day. He says you may clean the outside of the cup but the inside is just filthy. That's a form of godliness, appearing to the world or to other people on the surface of appearing godly.

II Timothy 3:5 - Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...

Now notice what he says about all of this – Paul is telling this young minister...

II Timothy 3:5 - ...from such turn away.

Don't follow – don't get yourself in that environment because you will be corrupted by it over time if you allow yourself to associate with them closely over time.

So, let's understand, the second point is separation from a wrong environment is a biblical principle – it is biblically sound.

The third point – we're talking about being in a wrong environment with a group of people in the second point, but the third point is about individuals.

3. Separation from individuals is a biblical principle also.

We have the example, the one that might first come to mind, is something as small as an interpersonal squabble. This is not over doctrine or salvation, but Paul and Barnabas you remember had a problem. It got so heated that they had words with each other. Look at Acts chapter 15. This was immediately after the conference in

Jerusalem. I heard here not long ago that there was a notion, on the subject of governance, that Paul would go out and go to an area and get them organized and then leave and never come back. It was up to them to take care of themselves. Acts chapter 15 proves that that was not the case – Paul was very concerned about the brethren and he would go back to see them. Acts chapter 15 and verse 36 – this is after the conference.

Acts 15:36 - And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the LORD, to see how they are doing.

Does that sound like a guy that just walks off and has this distant approach to the people that he has baptized or called through his preaching, set up a church and maybe ordained an elder there and he just walks off and leaves them? Absolutely not – the bible says differently. Now verse 37...

Acts 15:37 - And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

But Paul had a different idea in verse 38...

Acts 15:38 - But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to do the work.

So Mark had departed from the two of them and Paul didn't like that. He thought probably, I'm reading between the lines a little bit, that maybe he wasn't loyal, maybe he deserted, maybe he had something personal to do and is putting his own personal desires above preaching the gospel. So that didn't sit well with Paul. Barnabas, for whatever reason, thought it was okay. Maybe he knew Mark better, maybe Mark repented, or maybe he knew some details about Mark's life that Paul didn't know – we have not a clue. But there was a disagreement about this between the two of them. In verse 39...

Acts 15:39 - And the contention was so sharp between them...

This was not just something that was minor! Meaning they must have had harsh words and maybe lost their temper a little bit – it got heated between the two of them.

Acts 15:39-40 - ...that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed...

So rather than put themselves together in a contentious atmosphere, they realized that it was better to separate and let tempers cool down. Barnabas, you do what you want

and Paul, you do what you want and let's separate for awhile. The principle of separation applies. It applies sometimes, regretfully, even in marriage. I Corinthians talks about that – to separate for a time if you have to, to let things cool down. The point is that separation from individuals, one from another, is a biblical principle, and this was over an interpersonal matter – relationships between two individuals.

Separation from individuals occurs over heresy. Let's go and look at a couple of scriptures about that. Let's go to Titus 3 and we're going to read verses 10 and 11. Talking about separating from somebody who is bringing in teachings that are not correct.

Titus 3:10 - A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

You don't reject him after the first, because you bring it to their attention, give them the opportunity to see and to repent. If nothing happens you go back a second time. If they don't heed after the second time, then we are told that they should be rejected. The Greek word for "reject", Strongs 3868, literally means "to beg off". If somebody invites you to an event and you don't want to go, you beg off. You say "I don't want to do that". And so you beg off of associating with this person. It can also mean "to avoid, or refuse". So you just avoid contact with them, or refuse contact with somebody who is a heretick and keeps pushing it and pushing it and pushing it. Now if they keep it to themselves, you wouldn't know would you? Or if they try and talk to you and you say you don't want to hear that, and then they shut up, and they don't say it to anybody, they don't try and push their views, then you can give them some time and space. But somebody who keeps hammering away, pretty soon it will begin to affect you, just like we read earlier about leaven.

Look at I Timothy chapter 6. Timothy needed a lot of advice, he was a young man. He was traveling with Paul, but Paul also sent him out on his own. He was pasturing churches and he would run into problems, and Paul was giving him some much needed advice. I Timothy chapter 6 beginning in verse 3.

I Timothy 6:3 - 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;

And here we're talking about words meaning conversation or to teachings. Now verse 4, if somebody doesn't heed, he is:

I Timothy 6:4 - He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting...

Doting meaning paying attention to, hanging over, hanging around.

I Timothy 6:4 - ...about questions and strifes of words...

And people sometimes get hung up on a word, or hung up on a doctrine. It's not salvational, and in the great scheme of things it's not that important, but they make it important. They have to get their point across. He says, what comes out of this is:

I Timothy 6:4 - ...where comes envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

In other words, division. People get upset – it's creating discord in the congregation. He goes on:

I Timothy 6:5 - Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness...

And the gain could be something more than just money. The gain could be attracting a following. The gain could be trying to get somebody to see it from your point of view, over something that's relatively insignificant. Notice the last phrase:

I Timothy 6:5 - ...from such withdraw yourself.

We're talking about separation from individuals that can lead you astray, or create a wrong attitude on your part. In this case it involves heresy.

Another biblical injunction is we should separate from those who cause confusion or division or offense. Confusion and offenses. Look at II Thessalonians chapter 3. Now I'm not obviously talking about why we all left Worldwide, because there was heresy there and the principals that we've been discussing, the only way that you could avoid associating with people of incorrect minds, you had to leave yourself. And we've all been through that. II Thessalonians 3 verses 6 and 7. Notice what Paul says to the church.

II Thessalonians 3:6 - Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Now that's about as strong as a minister can say. I command you, not of myself, but in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Thessalonians 3:6 - ...that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

Now what does he mean by disorderly? That is the Greek word "ataktos" and it's Strong 814. Thayer tells us, this has particular meaning for me, coming from the military, it means "out of ranks" and if you've been in the military you know what I mean when they say the term "out of ranks".

When I went to Texas A&M, one of the things you learn as a military cadet is you learn how to march. And for four years you march. The first year you're learning how to march, and then the second year you set an example for the first year people, and then for the third year, I was a first sergeant in my third year, a drill instructor, so you're the one yelling at those who don't know how to march too well. So when you talk about unity and oneness, and most of you have never experienced this, but if you get a squadron of say 60 or 70 men, and you're marching to a band or a drum beat or a first sergeant calling out cadence, and if the group is good at it, they have a unity. They become one. And if you're watching that group of men marching and there is not one thing out of step, all the columns all the rows are perfect. When you walk your head moves just a little bit, but you see the whole group moving like this together, together, together. And I'll tell you, with me, you get chills up and down your spine when you know that everybody is in sync and everybody is focused and everybody is together.

Unfortunately, there is occasionally somebody that is out of step. So you see this group together, and then you see this head bobbing up and down by itself. Now as a first sergeant, if I saw that, I would walk up and I was walking right beside this kid, and I started yelling and screaming at him. Now there's a reason for this. Because if he can't endure the yelling and screaming of a first sergeant then what's he going to do in combat? So you're yelling and screaming at this guy to get in step, get in step, and using some language that shouldn't be used and using some examples and making some remarks about his heritage and all that, to put pressure on him to get him in line. One of my favourite comments was, you would be yelling at him, this far away from his ear, something to the effect that "I bet your mommy thinks the whole squadron is out of step except you!" and sure enough, there's this one guy bobbing up and down and everyone else is in sync. That's what this word means, "ataktos", it means "out of ranks" or "out of step" with everybody else. Another definition is "deviating" from the prescribed order or rule. An oddball we would say, or somebody that just doesn't understand and doesn't get it.

We're told here, withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks in the way of ataktos. Meaning they just are contrary and they don't believe. He says in verse 7...

II Thessalonians 3:7 - For yourselves know how you ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly [ataktos] among you;

Paul says, "I wasn't out trying to lead you guys astray, I wasn't out trying to cause division and dissension and we got together and we formed a group in a given town or community and we cohesed together under God's law and God's way" and then Paul would go on and they would function and he could come back and visit and check up on them and all of that. And so he says to be careful of those who cause confusion or division or offense.

Look at Romans chapter 16. Again, talking about divisions and offenses – people being hurt and divided, people being polarized. One of the things that gets my ire up, more than just about anything, is politics. And I have had a belly full of politics! I know most of you here have had a belly full of politics – that’s where people have an agenda, and then they hop around from person to person getting them revved up about their agenda. Trying to get a following and trying to politic to get their way. Paul talks about this. Look at Romans 16 and verse 17.

Romans 16:17 - Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them....

And the Greek means to “take note of, to identify”.

Romans 16:17 - ...which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them.

And why are we to do that?

Romans 16:18 - For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly...

Meaning to take advantage and to gain a following, or to salve their insecurity, where they want people to agree with them or follow them or whatever, serving their own interests.

Romans 16:18 - ...and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

They deceive people. That’s why we need to separate from those who might deceive us, might lead us astray – it’s a Godly principle.

Notice a final scripture in this third point in Matthew chapter 18. We’ve talked so much about Matthew 18, about when somebody sins against us and how we handle that in a proper and a Godly way. Matthew 18 and we’re going to read verses 15 through 17.

Matthew 18:15 - Moreover if your brother shall trespass [sin] against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone...

Keep it quiet and don’t talk to other people.

Matthew 18:15 - ...if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother.

Now let me give you an example. Neil gave a sermonette – I’ll put Neil on the spot here – and let’s say he said something in the sermonette that you didn’t agree with. I didn’t hear anything in his sermonette that we all couldn’t agree with, but let’s just say for the sake of argument that somebody heard something. Well generally, in practice, starting

back in the days of Worldwide and continuing up until recently, what would happen is that the person who had the beef wouldn't go to Neil directly – they would go to everybody else BUT Neil! Or they would come to the minister and they would say “You know, you gotta watch that guy, he said this and that!” and it creates division and problems. So we have a rule in this fellowship, we've talked about it, that if somebody has a problem with somebody speaking and they come to me, my first question will be “Have you talked to them?” and if they say no, then I will tell them that they are talking to the wrong guy, you need to go talk to them first. Because that is what Matthew 18 says – go and tell him his fault between you and him alone, and if he hears you, then you have gained your brother. Now that is assuming guilt. Quite often you go and you talk to somebody and say “well you said this” and he says “did I really? It's not in my notes, I don't remember it that way”, well that's the way they took it, and you might go and get the tape and listen. Or the person could say “Boy, if I said that, I didn't mean it that way. Here's what I meant, and I will apologize the next time I speak if other people took it that way.” So you find out it's not as big of a deal as you thought, and you walk away and you agree. I've had people, when I've spoken on the internet before, I've had people call me and say I've said something, and every time when people have called me, we've worked it out. Either I misspoke and I didn't say it very clearly, or they misheard it, and at the end of the day everybody agreed and everything was fine. Because you have two people with God's Spirit working together and they are trying to seek the truth and reach the truth – it will generally always work out.

So in verse 15, that's what this refers to. Now, verse 16.

Matthew 18:16-17 - But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them [the witnesses], tell it to the church...

Now the word “church” we know is “ekklesia” – it's not referring to the ministry, it's referring to the brethren. Take it to the brethren.

Matthew 18:17 - ...but if he neglect to hear the church [brethren], let him be unto you as a heathen man and a publican.

Putting it in the terms of the Jews of the day. Because these were infidels – the heathen man and the publican – they didn't believe in the Sabbath or holydays. We're told that in this circumstance, you have to separate. You wouldn't fellowship necessarily with somebody like that. You wouldn't have a close association. So the third point is that separation from individuals is a scriptural principle that we find in the bible.

Now, with that in mind, it leads us to the fourth point.

4. How should we treat those that we separate from?

How should we treat them? What should our attitude be? If we have separated for any number of reasons, and I'm not saying any specific reason at this point.

Some people have the notion that if you separate from somebody, you should shun them. In the sense that, we've all seen movies over the years, about the Quakers where somebody commits a sin in this Quaker community and they're shunned by the group. So you see the movies where somebody walks up to somebody and they stick their nose up in the air and they turn and walk in a different direction. They won't even talk to them or look at them. Let's go to II Thessalonians 3 and verse 6. Is that what God means? Is that the way that we should treat somebody that we disassociate with, or that we separate from for legitimate reasons?

II Thessalonians 3:6 - Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly...

We read that earlier, we focused on the word "disorderly", but this time let's focus on the word "withdraw". That's Strongs 4724 and it is the Greek word "stello" and it means "to abstain from associating with", or Thayer's says "to abstain from familiar intercourse with an individual." Meaning doing the things which you would normally do every day on a daily basis.

Now what does that mean if you run into somebody in a grocery store? Somebody that maybe has sinned and has been disfellowshipped, or somebody that you've separated from for doctrinal reasons or any other reasons. What do you do when you see them? Let me give you an example of what NOT to do.

I have a minister friend of mine who was falsely accused by some people – falsely accused. They, three or four people, had it in their minds that he did something wrong, and they just couldn't get over it, so they left his local church. Well he and his wife were in the grocery store one day and were walking down the aisle and one of those individuals was coming towards them. Looked at them, stuck her nose up in the air, and very plainly did a 180 and disappeared. And here, the reason for separation wasn't something that was salvational let's say. It wasn't over the Sabbath or the holydays or anything like that. And they just felt really hurt, because these were formerly their close friends. It's just so sad that people can get such a self-righteous attitude that if my sleeve comes in contact with their sleeve, like the Jews of Christ's time felt, that you were then unclean and you had to go home and wash because you even came within germ distance of somebody. And that is not what we're talking about here. Because what did Christ say in Matthew 5 and verse 44? He said to love our enemies. And this is talking enemies – people that are out to get us! Bless those that curse you – people

that are cursing you. Do good to those who hate you. Now think about that? And pray for those who spitefully use you – out of spite – and who persecute you.

Let me ask a question – how can you do good to somebody that you don't have any contact with? You can't. We're not talking intimate palsy-walsy contact with. But how can you do good to somebody – even your enemy that hates you – if you don't have some contact? You can send them an email. You hear that somebody's in the hospital or that somebody's been in a car wreck or somebody has been sick – that's doing good to them. If you absolutely shun them and have no contact with them at all, how can you do good to somebody that hates you? You have to have some contact to a degree so you don't totally close that door. Because I'm telling you, if you keep the door open, to a degree, where they could call you or you could call them, if they repent and if they change, they would be more willing to come back.

We had a situation like that several years ago with folks that kept a different calendar. We knew that this particular year the calendar was not synced up between their view and the traditional view, and so they wouldn't attend the Feast. This one individual I'm thinking about was living close by the Feast site, within a hundred miles or so, so we invited him and asked him to come over the Sabbath during the Feast. The individual wasn't quite sure, and so I said "You know, it's the Sabbath! You believe in the Sabbath, we believe in the Sabbath. We differ on the calendar, but come over for the Sabbath." So this individual came over, went to services, fellowshiped afterward and had a wonderful time, and then they went back home. Well a couple of years later this person concluded that they were wrong on the calendar. And then guess what? Because you didn't slam the door in his face, or stick your nose up and turn around in the aisle and walk away, this individual was far more apt to come back. Felt far more welcome in that regard.

So when we disassociate ourselves with people or somebody has to be disfellowshipped – I hope that never happens – that doesn't mean that you never talk to them. That doesn't mean that you hate them. It just means that you don't associate on a day to day regular basis with them. We also should not condemn them or hate them. We shouldn't do that.

Look at Luke 6 and verse 37. Christ has a very strong admonition to us about condemning other people – that we should not do this. They may be on a wrong path, they may be confused, and they may be even bitter for a period of time, but does that give us the right to condemn and to judge? No it does not.

Luke 6:37 - Judge not, and you shall not be judged...

Now that word “judge” is Strongs 2919, and it’s the Greek word “krino” and it means “to decide, either mentally or judicially”, or by implication it means to put them on trial, to condemn them or to punish them. When we judge erroneously, in our minds we are putting them on trial and we are charging them as being guilty. And what did God say to us about knowing somebody’s heart? Who knows somebody’s heart? Not us. We can’t read anybody’s heart. We can see the fruits and I can evaluate the fruits. But I can’t read their heart – only God can. But yet some people set themselves up as judges and juries and they know their heart! And they judge them accordingly! The scripture goes on to say...

Luke 6:37 - ...condemn not, and you shall not be condemned...

That word “condemn” is Strongs 2613, and it means “to pronounce guilty”. That means you’ve read their heart, you know their heart is wrong, and you pronounce them guilty.

Luke 6:37 - ...forgive, and you shall be forgiven:

So we should always have a spirit that is ready to forgive – eager, wanting to forgive, if they change and repent and come back. But the point is, that we don’t know anybody’s heart – only God does. Look at I Samuel 16 and verse 7.

This is talking about judging those who would be King of Israel. Samuel was interviewing young men of Jesse’s household, and he was looking on the countenance, he was looking on the appearance, and boy, God was reading Samuel’s mind and you could tell Samuel was thinking “This is the guy! He’s 6’5” and he’s 250 pounds and he’s good looking – he’s gotta be the guy!”.

I Samuel 16:7 - But the LORD said to Samuel, Look not on his countenance[his outward appearance], or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

We have to be very careful about judging somebody’s heart. We’re told that we should judge fruits – yes, we have to. But then to extrapolate that and say that you know this individual’s heart is a totally different leap, and we can’t leap there.

So, the fourth point is dealing with how we should treat those that we separate from – in the world or out of the world. We separate, yes, but we don’t condemn them and we don’t hate them. We keep the door open.

Now, the fifth and last point – we bring it up to the present time, what’s happening today in our group.

5. Like-minded brethren will come together.

And that is exactly what is happening today – like-minded brethren will come together. The whole subject that we're talking about is the company that we keep. And the fact is, that if people have God's Holy Spirit, and they are deeply committed to doing it God's way, like-minded people will come together. It's going to happen – it's happening now.

We often read Amos 3 and verse 3. I'm going to read it out of the New Living translation because it adds a dimension that I think is very interesting. Talking about two people walking together – a very famous scripture.

Amos 3:3 - Can two people walk together, without agreeing on the direction?
(NLT)

It's so obvious! You can't walk together if you're heading in different directions – you just can't! One's going over here, one's going over there. That means that there is a separation that occurs. But, if you agree on the direction, then two people can walk together. That's what's happening in this fellowship right now – we agree on the direction, therefore we walk together.

Those like-minded should be the company that we keep. I talked at Pentecost about the file cabinet – you know, the giant file cabinet with the hanging file folders and God is giving us the time to file ourselves in an appropriate file folder. So you file yourself in a folder with like-minded people. The way you view the bible, Christ's life and His example and all these things that we read in the bible – you find that you come together with people that view it the same way you do. And so you file yourself in that folder.

In this group brethren are coming together who really believe that God means what He says in Luke 10 and verse 27. It is so simple – the way of Christ is so simple! And yet, people can so complicate it that they negate the simplicity that is in Christ. Luke 10 and verse 27 – Christ is answering the question of what is the greatest commandment.

Luke 10:27 - And he answering said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

It is so simple. And yet in years past, we weasel around that, we wiggle around that. I heard for years, "you don't have to be a doormat!" Well it doesn't say anything about being a doormat right here. "You set yourself up to be taken advantage of!" Well yes, you do – but you learn very quickly if somebody's going to take advantage of you, and guess what? You separate, you withdraw from an individual that's going to do that. But the fact is, that we should love God first with everything we have, and then we should love each other as love ourselves. What a simple concept, but why don't we put it into practice? Why haven't we put it into practice? Why do we have all these buts and ifs and ands to keep us from putting it into practice? What I'm saying is, a like-minded

group is coming together that is tired of the ifs and the ands and the buts and we want to put it into practice. What a radical idea!

The brethren who are part of this fellowship are committed to fulfilling the new commandment that Christ gave shortly before He was taken captive in John 13 and verse 34. It's later amplified by the apostle John in I, II, and III John. Christ is trying to get the essential elements across to the disciples before He had to leave them.

John 13:34 - A new commandment I give unto you...

Now if Christ says He has something new, and it's a commandment, then we ought to be paying attention to it!

John 13:34 - ...That you love one another; as [to the extent and degree] that I have loved you, that you also love one another.

And this has not been practiced to the extent that it should have, among God's people down through the decades. We, in this fellowship, have a group of committed people who want to do just that! With no excuses, no ifs ands and buts, but want to do that.

I've commented at several of our meetings that we've had since we started, that I've heard not long ago that the purpose of the church is not to provide for the physical needs of the brethren. That was made in a conference! And Dorothy's jaw dropped open and so did mine. Because that's not what the bible says. Now granted, we should put the spiritual needs of the brethren first, and the spiritual needs come before physical needs, but that doesn't mean we ignore the physical needs. Look at I John 3 and verse 17. This is something that we need to pay very close attention to. Because if somebody is starving, or doesn't have any gasoline in their tank to go to church or to go to the grocery store, how on earth can we call ourselves Christian and ignore that?

I John 3:17 - But whoso has this world's good...

And we do! The poorest of us in God's church live like kings compared to what you find in Afghanistan and Iraq and India and China.

I John 3:17 - But whoso has this world's good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?

You can't get around this scripture. And remember, in Matthew 25 where Christ was using the parable of the sheep from the goats and he separated the sheep from the goats and He said to the sheep, "Enter into my Kingdom" and they said "what did we do?" and Christ says "You have fed me and you have clothed me and you have visited me when I was sick and you took me into your house when I needed shelter" and they

said “when did we do that?” and He said “When you did it to the least of these my brethren.” That’s all physical! But it’s motivated by agape love. I was told that was not true – that it’s phileo love. I believe that that is a heresy – that is wrong. Because if I look back in your life, like I look back in my life, years ago I wouldn’t have done that. But I do it now and you do it now because you have God’s Spirit in you – you have agape love in you, which means you behave differently now than you used to before you were converted. And so Christ said to these people “You have done it unto me when you do it to the least of these my brethren. And then he looked over at the goats and says that they’re going into the lake of fire! They said “Well, why?! We preached the gospel, we did this and that, we printed books, we were on television, we did all of this stuff!” and Christ said “You didn’t visit me, you didn’t clothe me, you didn’t provide for me when I was in need, and I don’t care what you did! I don’t care how many tithe dollars you sent in to do this or that, but you personally never went and took care of your brother or sister in the church on a personal level.” Visiting, clothing, feeding, giving rides and all of that. Christ condemned them to the lake of fire. Now that is a scary concept! But what I’m saying is, the brethren who are coming into this fellowship believe this with all their hearts.

Christianity is a personal thing. Christianity is not only how you think, but how you treat other people, loving your brother, loving your neighbor as yourself. And what God is doing is bringing like-minded humans together to put into practice this new commandment that has been too often ignored among God’s people.

So, what have we seen? We’ve seen that our companions and the environment they create will have a definite influence on us. We have seen that separation from a wrong environment is a biblical principle and separation from individuals who could lead us astray is a biblical principle. We have seen how we should treat those that we separate from – that we shouldn’t hate them, we shouldn’t judge them, we shouldn’t shun them in the way that we’ve seen on television and such. But the fifth point, and the most important point, is that like-minded brethren are coming together, where we can practice God’s way. This is the company that we should keep.

So let’s understand this fundamental truth: that the company we keep is of paramount importance to God, and to a large extent defines who we are, as we heard in the beginning. Who we surround ourselves with reflects on us and it defines who we are. And God is very concerned about the company that we keep.