

Wrong Associations (With Men, Ministries, Movements & Music)

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Many New Evangelicals or the modern evangelical movement that stems from the compromise of the past evangelicals, who separated from Fundamentalism and separatist principles in the 1940's-50's, continues to stress that we are to come together as the "one body of Christ" and that the Bible stresses fellowship (Acts 2:42). But like any truth or truism, it can become abused and go far beyond the purpose and parameters that God intended it to have. This is because the Bible clearly warns us against joining with those religious associations which deny the truth and who embrace apostate and false doctrine. But the Bible also informs us to separate from those institutions which do not practice Bible separation and which promote pagan philosophy and worldly music. This would include churches that preach the Gospel and which are part of the true family of God. There are times we must separate from men, ministries, and entire movements if we want to remain loyal to God instead of loyal to an institution or popular religious figure.

Commands and the Association Principle

Ephesians 5:7

"Be not ye therefore **partakers** (*co-sharer or joint-participant and partner*) with them."

This is *guilt by practice* and involves practicing the same sins as others. We participate with the sins of others when we practice the same sins. However, the larger application applies to *guilt by association* by partnering with men, movements, and ministries which are promoting error and worldliness. Whenever we partner with something or someone, who is promoting false teaching and worldliness, we *indirectly*, to some extent, "jointly-participate" with the error of that movement and ministry. This is a law of reason and the inevitable result of joining together.

Ephesians 5:11

"And have no **fellowship** (*co-participation and sharing*) with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove (*correct*) them."

This is referring to *guilt by practice*, when we commit the same sins as others. Once again, the larger application applies to *guilt by association*, when we partner with men, movements, missions, and ministries which are doctrinally corrupt and worldly in practice. Whenever we partner with something or someone, who is promoting false teaching and worldliness, we *indirectly*, to some extent, “jointly-participate” with the error of that man, movement, or ministry.

1 Corinthians 10:20

“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have **fellowship** (*companionship, partnership, association*) with devils.”

This is referring to *guilt by association*. The Corinthian Christians were attending the local restaurant where pagan worship and apostasy was being practiced. In doing so, they were indirectly fellowshipping with demons, since those practicing the pagan religion, were sacrificing meat to idols, and since demons were behind this idolatrous practice.

Robert Gromacki comments:

“The idolater was a Christian whose participation in the heathen diet and festivals actually manifested an acceptance with the pagan rites.”

In other words, the churches and religious institutions we attend suggests that we have a *cooperative spirit* with what normally goes on in that religious setting.

1 Timothy 5:22

“Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be **partaker** (*co-sharer or joint-participant, partner*) of other men's sins (*by putting our stamp of approval on them and what they practice*): keep thyself pure.”

This is referring to *guilt by association*. When elders ordain another man without examining his life, qualifications, and doctrines, they become a participant in that man's departure and sins, which he commits, while holding the office.

Revelation 18:4

“And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not **partakers** (*co-participant*) of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

This is referring to *guilt by practice* with the secondary application of *guilt by association*. Where we go and what we do sends a message of who we are and what we represent.

2 John 1:10-11

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is **partaker** (sharer and partner) of his evil deeds.”

This is referring to *guilt by association*. When we help and house the cults of Christendom and those who oppose truth, we actually become a sharer and partner in their evil ways and works. We are promoting them and helping to push their agenda.

2 Corinthians 6:14-17 gives the command for Bible separation by stating some common sense Biblical principles that need to be applied to all forms of separation (*personal, family, ecclesiastical*): “for what **fellowship** (*partnership, participation*) hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what **communion** (*joint-participation, association, fellowship*) hath light with darkness? And what **concord** (*agreement*) hath Christ with Belial (*the Devil*)? or what **part** (*portion or share*) hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what **agreement** (*approval and consent*) 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** (*their programs, policies, places, patterns, and practices which represent apostasy and pagan worship*), and be ye **separate** (*making boundaries and setting limits from heathen practices and unrighteous ways*), saith the Lord, and **touch not** (*attach oneself to, adhere, cling to*) the unclean thing (*apostasy and pagan worship*); and I will receive you” (*fellowship with God*).

These verses speak of *guilt by practice and wrong association*, since these saints were also chided for fellowshiping with demons indirectly, by being in the place where pagan worship was taking place (1 Cor. 10:20). We should never partner with unbelief and paganism in any way, *directly* or *indirectly*, since it violates clear spiritual laws that God has established for Bible separation.

1 Thessalonians 5:22

“Abstain from all **appearance** of evil.”

This means we should refuse to participate with whatever “form” evil takes. However, what might be *perceived* as a form of evil, or only appears to be bad, also falls under this warning.

2 Thessalonians 3:6

“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.”

2 Thessalonians 3:14

“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.”

This refers to separation from other Christians (the brethren), at least on a church or ecclesiastical level, who have become corrupt in their living and practice. By extension, it applies to separating from those men, movements, missionary agencies, and ministries that are supported by other brethren, which promote wrong doctrine, worldly contemporary music, and charismatic experiences.

John Miles said:

“Believers can lead us into compromising positions more quickly than anyone else. So though we long to fellowship with believers and recognize the unity of the body of Christ, if a believer leads us into a compromising position where our loyalty to God is going to be questioned and compromised, then we have to part company with that believer. This seems like a contradiction to many, but again we must remember the most important thing in life is to be loyal to God and to do His will. As Jesus said, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself (say no to himself), and take up his cross (the will of God) and follow me.’”

Application of the Association Principle

When we associate with something or someone, it normally (not always) indicates we partner and cooperate with them, agree with them, endorse them, sanction them, and condone what the movement or the person represents. When applying

the “association principle” to different men, ministries, and movements, there must be *caution* and even *common* sense applied to each situation at hand.

The caution is that we can become too lenient and undiscerning, if we are not careful, and no longer have our “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). We can also fail to “prove all things” as the Scripture commands (1 Thess. 5:21). Sometimes we put up with things we should put out of our personal lives and church ministry. On the other hand, we can become too narrow, if we are not careful. In other words, we can place ourselves in a box, walk in a straight jacket, and find it nearly impossible to live and function in society and do church ministry, fearing that we might be linking ourselves with the enemy and error in some distant and indirect way. Some carry the association principle too far, while others don’t carry it all. Blessed are the balanced!

Edmond Hiebert gave this remark while writing on the subject: “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22). He wrote: “It’s not always possible to abstain from everything which may appear evil to a narrow and foolish judgment.” In other words, we must be careful that we don’t condemn that which is good on the basis of *wrongly applying* the association principle of Bible separation.

The “association principle” (fellowship, partaker, partner, cooperation, endorsement, agreement principle) that is repeatedly taught in the Bible means that God’s saints are not to *directly* or *indirectly* associate with those who promote error or practice worldliness, especially in a religious-based setting, where God’s truth and holiness are to be vindicated and upheld at all cost. Wrong association applies to developing partnerships with ecclesiastical movements, men, and ministries which run contrary to truth, righteousness, and holiness.

Wrong associations can be viewed as a link in a chain. The true Bible separatist should never want to be a link in the chain that leads to or promotes ecumenicalism, apostasy, and contemporary Christianity with its false teaching, worldly music, and pragmatism.

I must ecclesiastically (in a church setting) separate from anyone that *is* the enemy, everyone who *represents* the enemy, anybody that *mixes* with the enemy, and anything that *reflects* the enemy (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

How does this apply to the type of music I listen to within my personal life and church ministry? The principle of association does not mean I must necessarily separate myself from a good song that may be written by a Christian composer, whose theology might be in question. I can separate from the man and his errant theology without necessarily separating from a musical piece that might be written by the man, when the melody and message are Bible based.

When do we “wrongly associate” or link up with those men, movements, ministries, and musical expressions that are promoting error and worldliness? When do we compromise? Answering some questions will help us determine if we are directly or indirectly associating with those things which are corrupt and questionable in practice, which are taking place in contemporary and compromising ministries. First, think through the questions below which pertain to musical expression.

- Is the song Biblical (Romans 4:3)?
- Is it doctrinal (Titus 2:10)?
- Is the melody and message of a song a spiritual song that is separated from the course of the age (Col. 3:16)?
- Does the melody and message of a song reflect rock music, rebellion, entertainment, and worldliness or does it reflect order, decency, and reverence for God’s holiness (1 Cor. 14:40; Ps. 89:7)?
- Does it glorify God – His character of holiness (1 Cor. 10:31)?
- Does it refuse to mix righteousness with unrighteousness or light with darkness (2 Cor. 6:14)?
- Is it ungodly and worldly (Titus 2:12)?
- Does it represent the works of darkness (Eph. 5:11)?
- Is it promoting that which is good (1 Thess. 5:21)?

If we can answer all of these in the affirmative, or with the assurance that no command or principle of Bible separation has been breached, then we cannot be violating any “association principle” based on Scriptural commands related to the doctrine of Bible separation.

When do we compromise? The *guilt by association* occurs with someone, or some other movement and ministry, when I place myself in the same atmosphere, where the error or worldliness is being promoted (1 Cor. 10:20) and when I

practice the same worldly things that a movement and ministry practices, which are contrary to righteousness (Eph. 5:7, 11). For instance, we are not identifying with the rock culture if we REFUSE to imbibe its musical perversion. We should never use those words, styles and sounds that are perverted, worldly, or which represent heathen music. But remember, I can effectively separate from a man, ministry, or movement without avoiding every good thing a man has written, composed, or said.

For instance, I separate from the pope and Roman Catholic Church by refusing to attend this apostate church, by not praising the pope, and endorsing Catholic literature. In a similar way, if need be, I must separate from a man, ministry, or movement that is promoting error and worldliness which might very well include brothers (2 Thess. 3:6). I separate by refusing to attend a specific church ministry, engage in the worldly activities and theological compromise of a certain movement, or openly endorse a man's ministry. Nevertheless, there are times I might quote someone or enjoy a musical selection written by a person that is not in the same fundamentalist camp that I am part of without violating the separation command and association principle.

Reflect on these questions.

- Do I wrongly associate with a person or the New Evangelical Movement just because I have some books in my library that have been written by New Evangelical authors, which I might not fully agree with? The answer is obvious – no!
- Do I wrongly associate with some person or a specific movement just because I independently have a service at a rescue mission where other preachers (charismatic or of the liberal persuasion) have also held services? No!
- Does a preacher wrongly associate and agree with another preacher on every issue just because he speaks on the radio and shares the same air waves as other preachers? Again, the answer is obvious – no!
- Is it wrong to shop at a mall where there may be some questionable stores and am I endorsing those bad stores within the mall, even if I don't shop at them? No.
- Am I endorsing the pope and Roman Catholic Church if I sing Christmas songs? No.

- Is it wrong to shop in a grocery store that sells liquor, when you are outside the state of Pennsylvania, fearing that you might be promoting the selling and glorification of liquor? The answer is again “no.”
- Is it wrong to sing some of the hymns today because the composers used the melodies of various secular tunes of their own day and culture? No.
- What if a man wrote some lovely Gospel songs and then took a spiritual nosedive and began to compromise with the world and ecumenical culture? Are we now promoting his worldliness, failures, and ecumenicalism, if we sing the songs that he composed? No.

The answer to all these questions is once again a resounding “no” since the melodies did not violate the Biblical laws of ordered music, holiness, and reverence.

- In our church hymnal, we have several choruses written by Bill Gaither. If we sing one of these songs, does this make us a partner and endorser of all that Bill Gaither stands for in his ministry with his charismatic music and associations, rock culture, long hair on men, etc.? No.
- If a certain song is sung at an ecumenical Billy Graham crusade, does this mean we must refuse to sing it in our church, out of fear that we will endorse the ecumenical movement that uses the same song? No.
- Andrea Crouch wrote “To God Be the Glory” and “Through It All” while Dottie Rambo wrote “Sheltered in the Arms of God.” John W. Peterson also wrote many lovely songs and choruses that have blessed the hearts of many (“What Grace is This?”). These artists, along with some of their music, has a contemporary flare, and they are in some way associated with the contemporary music movement (CCM). Does this mean we are endorsing all that they do, in their personal lives, and what they associate with, when singing some of their songs? No.
- Is it wrong to use a guitar in a fundamental or separatist church, since guitars are associated with the CCM movement? No.
- When regular hymns are taken, changed, and used in the contemporary movement, does this mean that they have become corrupt musically and should never be used by the conservative and fundamental church? No.

You can “bridge” or “crossover” any music and make it contemporary; however, when this bridge occurs with a hymn, such as “Great is Thy Faithfulness” or

“Amazing Grace” it does not make it a “bridge song” into the contemporary movement, even though it has been corrupted musically by that movement. I once heard an arrangement of “Silent Night” which was almost indiscernible because of the rock music and corruption of this piece of music. Nevertheless, I still sing Silent Night!

No Man’s Land and the Association Principle

Years ago, on youth retreats, we used to play a game called “capture the flag.” In this game there was an area of ground called “no man’s land” in which both groups could wander, and they would never be considered on the enemy’s side. By comparison, there is common ground (not compromising ground) that might be called “no man’s land” which does not identify, associate, endorse, or bridge a gap between different ministries and movements, or between the conservative and contemporary. For instance, both the contemporary and non-contemporary movements do share *some* common ground, since they do uphold various truths, promote some good lyrics, and are burdened for the salvation of souls.

Sometimes we need to sift through the “association issue” with care and rethink how far we will take this principle. If we come to one conclusion (no use of contemporary choruses in conservative churches which were written in the 1980’s), then we must follow through with this conclusion in every area. The way to implement and defend this position (no use of contemporary songs in conservative churches) is not easy, since over the years there has always been some measure of “sharing” or “crossover” of secular music into the conservative, sacred realm; howbeit, it was not music that was tainted by worldly beats and rhythm (a point the contemporary movement misses).

This “crossover” between the secular and sacred was experienced during the hymn history of the church, when composers would sometimes use secular tunes, even some tunes that were played in taverns, and link them to some of the newly formed hymns. The style and form of most Gospel songs were borrowed directly from the popular musical styles of the nineteenth century. These folk tunes, which were NOT a form of perverted rock music (Col. 3:16), were made famous by Sankey and Moody. So, historically there has been some sharing between the secular and sacred and the same is true today. Of course, no church should discard the music of the past for the sake of wanting to be contemporary or up to

date. When it comes to good, wholesome, Christian music, we might do well to remember the old cliché which says:

“Make new friends but keep the old,
One is silver and the other’s gold.”

We should continue draw from the rich hymn heritage of the past but not avoid some of the newer songs and hymns which are sound, separated, and Scriptural. We must remember that some *similarity* does not always mean *uniformity*, or that every ministry is headed in the same compromising direction, just because a contemporary song of the 1970’s is reworked, made acceptable, and used in a conservative/separatist church. A separated ministry, or pastor, should not be charged with using unseparated music when it is completely acceptable in melody and message. He should not be charged with *crossing over* denominational lines and creating a *bridge* (bridge music) between the contemporary movement with its emphasis on worldly music and the conservative or Fundamentalist Movement with its emphasis on separated music.

In other words, a church can maintain a clear testimony of separation from the contemporary church movement and remain firmly committed to truth, righteousness, holiness, and Biblical separation in the area of music, if it continues to separate from the radical elements being promoted within the contemporary movement. If what is being practiced, preached, or performed musically is both doctrinally and musically sound, it should be acceptable, and a church ministry should not be charged with the “guilt by association” principle.

On the other hand, if a ministry is constantly trying to keep *step* with various changes and practices in the contemporary movement (praise and worship teams, repetitive praise choruses, introducing drums for a new rhythmic sound or beat, jazzy music, questionable dress, copying every new song, promoting contemporary artists, living on the edge, etc.), they are becoming way too lenient, middle-of-the-road in their approach to ministry (Rev. 3:15-16), and will take on the appearance and very form of evil (1 Thess. 5:22).

Some churches, which were previously fundamental in their stance, continually breathe and live in the atmosphere of the contemporary movement and they are in danger of moving in that direction (Gal. 5:9). Other churches have a goal and

ultimate plan to get into the contemporary movement (Jer. 5:31). Therefore, if contemporary patterns are constantly emerging, resurfacing, and finding a beachhead within a church ministry, if a church ministry is broadening its horizons, consciously patterning itself after the worldly contemporary movement, and seeking to promote all the newest contemporary songs and fads, then the pastor is beginning to take a church in a compromising direction. Like trees, churches usually fall in the way they are leaning!

Preference and the Association Principle

Let us remember that not all separation is *Bible* separation; it is sometimes *preference* separation. We must sometimes make the distinction between the two. This means we should never attempt to leave a good Bible teaching and separated church over some *personal conviction and preference* which may not be backed by any concrete separation command or principle. Hasty “separators” must remember that the grass is not greener on the other side!

John Ashbrook has stated it this way:

“Separation is not the answer to every disagreement between brethren.”

Later he writes:

“Be careful not to run up the red flag for every mistake or differing decision.”

We must remember that we can have a personal conviction based upon *preference* but not *principle*. Furthermore, not everything demands separation. If this were the case, we would live in a bubble and never attend any fundamental church. We should ask, “What is the overall position of a church ministry regarding the contemporary movement and ecumenical practices? Do they separate from apostasy, musical rebellion, the enemy, those who promote evil, and worldly ways? This is what is most important.

In our church ministries, we should always strive to serve others (Gal. 5:13) in the best way possible, and never *offend* the conscience or *distract* another brother by any *alleged* associations with the contemporary world that he might perceive are wrong (1 Cor. 8:8-13). On the other hand, there must always be some “give and take” in every ministry and personal growth in grace. A ministry cannot be run on the personal convictions of a few people. Pastors (Hebrews 13:7), who are in the

fundamental camp, must determine the clear Biblical “association principles” that are commonly accepted and understood by the vast majority of separated saints, implement them, and avoid the extremes of trying to satisfy all the personal preferences of others.

For example, no Bible practicing, separatist pastor can serve all the personal preferences and convictions of others by making rigid restrictions for everyone else, by limiting certain songs because of certain composers who wrote them or refusing to sing them because of the initial background in which they were used. This was not practiced during the era of hymnology. For instance, “Come Thou Fount” was written by Robert Robinson who wandered far from the Lord after writing this hymn. However, it continued to be a beloved hymn of the church and Robinson eventually returned to the fellowship of the Lord.

Here is the point, when you start down an intricate and ill-advised “association” road, such as, no Christmas or Easter hymns, due to the alleged glorification of ancient, pagan holidays, no songs written after 1950, no new choruses, no saxophones, no guitars, only high church music, no hand held microphones, no Power Point Presentations, no background music, sooner or later there will be no room to move, and the church will become stuck in the traditions of man. Furthermore, when the saints are reprimanded for enjoying even the clean things, which God has freely given to them (1 Timothy 4:4-5), this can lead to a Pharisaical spirit within the church (Mark 7:1-9) and biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:15). Liberty should never be flaunted but neither can it be smothered by the personal preferences of a few church members.

We need to remember Romans 14:3, even within the Fundamentalist Movement: “Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.” If something is truly amoral and clean, then we must possess latitude and not condemn another for participating with the activity.

“In essentials, unity;
In non-essentials, liberty;
In all things, charity.”

My instructor at the Bible institute used to say:

“The main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things.”

The *main* things and *plain* things about Bible separation need to be embraced, agreed upon (Amos 3:3), and practiced; however, let’s not create mountains out of molehills. We need to be grateful when basic Bible separation is taught, practiced, and upheld in a church, without trying to regulate pastoral authority and press our own personal ideas and preferences on the whole congregation.

A separated church member, in spite of some personal preferences, needs to keep standing and effectively serving with others in church ministry who are rowing in the same direction. While serving, he would do well to emulate the separatist of old, who “with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon” (Neh. 4:17). Good advice for the days in which we live!

Cleaning Up Songs and the Association Principle

A fundamentalist church that might sing a song that has been changed by a conservative group is sometimes charged with attempting to make something that is unclean into something that is clean (Job 14:4). However, this is not necessarily the case. It’s the contemporary movement mentality which actually claims they can make something that is unclean (the perverted sounds of a rock culture) and recreate it to be clean, when they add Biblical words (“Let us do evil that good may come” – Rom. 3:8). This is reprehensible and a violation of separation commands and principles taught throughout the Bible, where it states we are to hate what is evil - not use evil (Ps. 97:10; Amos 5:15; Rev. 2:6). What is musically bad cannot be made morally clean.

That being said, a church is not touching “the unclean thing” (the sound of a perverted rock music), as stated in 2 Corinthians 6:17, if it decides to use the clean thing (the words of a good song) which might have been sung in the contemporary environment at one time. In fact, they are maintaining an important distinction between the clean (the words or lyrics) and the unclean (the sounds of a perverted rock culture), as stated in principle form within the Old Testament (Leviticus 10:10; Ezek. 22:26) and the separation principle in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:14-17). Furthermore, they are not associating with the

worldliness of the man or movement, since the song is clean, and since they are not compromising with any perverted forms of worship and paganism (John 4:22).

Conductor Arthur Fiedler died in July of 1979. Newspaper commentaries around the country carried one of Mr. Fiedler's favorite quotes: "There are only two kinds of music, good music and bad. If it is good -- I play it." This should be our goal and heart's desire, when it comes to playing and listening to music, which is honoring to God in both sound and words.

Everyday Living and the Association Principle

The principles of *fellowship, agreement, endorsement, cooperation, and association* with unrighteous or unholy actions, in a practical way, applies to all those places that we choose to attend in society, which are not the normal meeting places for commerce, daily activity, and living. We cannot completely avoid those normal places of daily commerce, such as stores, malls, and places of employment, which may house certain evils, or else we would have to go out of the world (1 Cor. 5:10). This separation (the association principle) primarily deals with those places of religious apostasy, worldly settings, atmospheres, and movements of pagan rebellion that can be easily avoided if the saint chooses to apply separation to his or her life.

Believers should want to avoid taking on the appearance or "form" (1 Thess. 5:22) that they are identifying or associating (1 Cor. 10:20; Eph. 5:7, 11) with the questionable, extreme, radical, worldly, immodest, and unbiblical movements within our society, such as the rock sound of a perverted culture, long hair on men, heathen practices of tattoos, excess body piercing, and the unisex philosophy in our present generation. These types of things represent rebellion to natural order (1 Cor. 11:15-16), rebellion toward God (1 Sam. 15:23) and His righteous standard (1 Tim. 6:11). This is because these things notoriously represent heathen practices, perversion of the sexes, lust, sex, and drugs. The key is to represent musical expression, the distinctions among the sexes, and holiness in the best possible light. Strive for excellence and superiority ("approve things that are excellent") instead of staying close to the line (Phil. 1:10).

The believer should be willing to part from these practices within a pagan and corrupt society and not associate with them in any fashion (Romans 12:2). In light

of the day in which we live, the believer should present *the least questionable testimony* before the world and represent Christianity as a non-rebellious movement of people that are different than the world and its standards. Care and discernment must be taken when considering what a church, place, movement, organization, activity, and job normally represents and what it primarily stands for in society.

In addition, preachers that accept compromising speaking engagements with churches, who support worldly music and ecumenical practices, not only violate the principles of Bible separation (2 Cor. 6:14-17), but they also become a stumbling block to other believers (Rom. 14:13). Christians, who attend churches that are ecumenically minded, and which support worldly music and other carnal practices, associate themselves with men and ministries that disobey or violate the clear teaching about Bible separation. This hinders their testimony of obedience to God's Word (1 John 2:15-17) and places a compromising mark upon their personal lives and ministries (Rev. 2:20).

The principle of association is why it is wrong for Christians to join the Masons, promote ecumenical gatherings with Mormons and apostate Protestantism, sit at a bar, and support a type of atmosphere which is known to house and promote terrible acts of sins, such as the movie theater and gambling casinos, which can be avoided, if chosen to do so.

The Importance of the Association Principle

Are associations really that important? As a preacher, does it matter with whom we participate in conferences or share platforms with? As a layperson, does it matter what church we attend and identify with? Should we be concerned about how God and others might perceive our participation with some church, a specific place, or some other group? Does it really matter where we go as a Christian? The Scripture demands that we answer all these questions in the affirmative since we are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11) in any way. *We must continue to recognize the principle of guilt by association.* The old adage is still true: "A man is known by the company he keeps" (1 Cor. 15:33). Let us not become naïve about this and let down our guard.

Of course, there are always those people who will chide the separatist for carrying the principle of association too far. Is it possible to apply this association principle in an extreme way? Yes, we can go overboard with the application of this separation command; however, this does not mean we must throw the baby out with the bathwater! Nevertheless, some well-meaning believers do carry this teaching so far that they no longer feel free to function in society within the normal places of commerce, gathering, and activity.

Believers are never told to cut themselves off from normal meeting or gathering places in society which are needed for functional living (Acts 17:17). It's impossible to avoid everything "for then must ye needs go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5:10). Yes, you can carry the principle of association too far. However, as stated already, the problem with most Christians is that they don't carry it at all! They don't want to apply the clear teaching of Bible separation to their lives and church ministries.

For instance, the compromising, religious place of worship, or predominantly evil setting that we attend, puts our stamp of approval on that place and what normally goes on in the place. *What we cooperate with we condone!* This is why it is wrong for a speaker to minister in settings where his presence constitutes any type of endorsement or promotion of a ministry that is New Evangelical or worldly in practice. This is why it is wrong for a Christian to attend a church that is liberal, or unseparated, and which teaches wrong doctrine, promotes worldly music, and other carnal practices. Our presence sends the message of our personal approval and endorsement upon a man, message, or ministry that we attend for corporate worship (1 Tim. 5:22).

Separation is healthy because we do not want to openly endorse, encourage, or sanction a man, if he publicly declares and personally accepts an unseparated position, nor do we want to put our stamp of approval upon any church that compromises with false doctrine, and which caters to apostasy and other ecumenical, worldly practices. Above all else, God's House (meeting place) must remain pure. This principle has been taught in both the Old and New Testaments (Ex. 25:18-22; Lev. 23:2; Jer. 7:11; Matt. 21:12-13; Acts 7:33; Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20).

God does not put up with worldliness and sin in His house of worship. God has always placed a high standard upon His dwelling place and the gathered meetings

of His people (Psalm 89:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-21; 14:33, 40). We must adopt God's standard and refuse to participate with and endorse those churches and movements that are liberal in doctrine and worldly in practice, by imbibing their worldliness, cultural contamination, and spurious teaching.

There are also secular places that are open pits for sin, which are abominable to God (Prov. 15:9). Certain places are known to be outright drinking holes, gambling centers, strong promoters of pornographic material, and secular humanism. These are places that totally mock what Christianity stands for and represents – purity and holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). These places must also be avoided, so believers do not endorse or sanction the openly sinful lifestyles and sales of such places.

Of course, it's true that grocery and certain convenience stores sell tobacco and sexually explicit magazines, and other items which should be deemed as worldly, but Christians must still shop and do normal business and activity in these places. But it's also true that Christians do not have to openly endorse those places that are not the normal meeting places within society, where commerce takes place. There are some places that are geared around one primary theme of drinking, sex, pornography, rock music, gambling, and loose worldly living. Lines of distinction must be drawn and discernment will keep believers from endorsing places that are nothing more than a devil's den and those places which major in pushing Satan's agenda.

Practical Questions on the Association Principle

There are some more questions we must ask ourselves, so we can practice the principle of association and apply the doctrine of personal, ecclesiastical, and family separation (separation from disobedient brothers) to our daily lives. Proper application of this teaching to our personal lives and churches is necessary, so we remain separated.

- What is the over-all emphasis of any secular and religious place?
- What does a church, place, organization, movement, job, or activity convey?
- What does it represent and stand for?
- What message does it communicate?

- Is there a clear promotion of doctrinal error and compromise taking place, which would make my presence there an outright endorsement of the church and promotion of its doctrinal departures?
- Is apostasy promoted by an ecclesiastical organization or denomination?
- Is there a strong standard for truth and is holiness maintained, as it relates to God's church, work, and people?
- Is there the promotion of worldliness, charismatic chaos, and many other questionable activities?
- Is interdenominational (ecumenical) work promoted within an organization which would link it with the apostasy of corrupt Protestantism and Christendom?
- Is there a breakdown of decency, reverence, honesty, and integrity that would be unbecoming for a Christian to identify with and represent?
- Can I put my stamp of agreement and endorsement upon a certain church, place, organization, movement, missionary agency, or particular activity, knowing what I do about it?
- Can I, in good conscience, cooperate, associate, and fellowship with a certain secular or religious organization, movement, church, activity, or job knowing what message it portrays, what it represents, and what it stands for in relationship to integrity, ecumenicalism, unbelief, false teaching, worldliness, or New Evangelicalism?
- Am I knowingly (James 4:17) condoning, cooperating, and associating with those men, movements and ministries that are compromising, corrupt, worldly, and ecumenical in their ministry and practices?
- Am I endorsing a mixture between light with darkness and uniting righteousness with unrighteousness (2 Cor. 6:14) by my involvement with a certain place, man, or ministry?
- Am I attempting to unite God's holy temple (my own body) with a pagan temple of unbelief and worldly practices (2 Cor. 6:16)?
- Have I applied the principle of holy distinction (1 Peter 1:14-16), not mixing the clean with the unclean (Lev. 10:10), to each movement, man, and ministry that I am associated with?
- Can I with a good conscience agree (Amos 3:3) with what a brother, movement, and organization is doing?
- Will my testimony of God's holiness be hindered (Heb. 11:5) by directly identifying with some place, movement, organization, or brother, which has not squared with the clear teaching of God's Word?

- Does my involvement in a certain ministry promote superior or excellent things (Phil. 1:10)?

These types of questions will guide us in our practical, daily, Bible separation and applying the association principle to our personal lives and church ministries wherever we serve. We must stay spiritually alert to the changing trends and be “understanding of the times” (1 Chron. 12:32).

A Quiz on the Association Principle

Read the next questions carefully and answer them in your own mind. This will help you to apply the “association principle” in a practical way.

- Is there a difference between a Barns and Noble bookstore that might sell questionable magazines and an adult bookstore? If so, why? What makes the difference?
- Is there a difference between a place that sells alcoholic beverage (grocery store, Pizza Hut) and a place that primarily is a bar atmosphere, and which is a known booze hole for drinking (V.F.W. or Rawhide Saloon atmosphere)? If so, why? What makes the difference?
- Is there a difference between going to a hockey game, bowling alley, supermarket, or shopping mall, which might play rock music, in comparison to another place of entertainment that majors on rock music, and which uses rock music as an integral part of its overall promotional activity? If so, why? What makes the difference?
- Is there a difference between watching a wholesome program on your television at home and going into a movie theater where every kind of filth known to mankind is openly shown, endorsed, honored and glorified? If so, why? What makes the difference?
- Is there a difference between going into a fuel convenience store that sells cigarettes and going into a place that might be called “Cigarette City” and which only majors in selling tobacco? If so, why? What makes the difference?
- Is there a difference between a liquor store and grocery store?
- Is there a difference between going into a convenience store that sells alcohol and going into a beer distributor store that majors on selling alcohol? If so, why? What makes the difference?

- What is the dominant feature of a place or activity?
- What are some of the primary things that are trying to be promoted?
- What is the overall emphasis of a place or activity?
- Does a place convey consistent and dominant unholy patterns or unwholesome entertainment?
- Is it known to be a place where dancing, nightclub activity, and such like, take place?
- Is it a place that glorifies lust and sin? If so, should a Christian attend such a place?
- Does the history or background of some place, activity, entertainment, and holiday continue to promote darkness, evil, wickedness, and those things which dishonor God's holiness (Eph. 5:11)?
- Is there a difference between the Christmas holiday and Halloween, even if they both have pagan roots? If so, why? What makes the difference?
- Is there a difference between a traditional deck of playing cards and another type of innocent card game? If so, why? What makes the difference?
- What appearance do I give, when I attend a certain place, or engage in a certain activity (1 Thess. 5:22)?
- Is it pagan and heathen in practice?
- Is there an attempt to unite righteousness with unrighteousness, or light with darkness?
- Is there an attempt to combine two conflicting, contrasting, and incompatible realms (2 Cor. 6:14)?
- Will I defile God's temple (my body) by involving myself in some activity or attending a particular place, which is corrupt in doctrine and worship (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16)?
- Will attending a certain place or involving myself in a specific activity bring shame to my Christian testimony of light (Matt. 5:14)?

When we answer these questions honestly, we can apply the principle of association and Bible separation to the places that we attend and to all our entertainments and activities.

May God help us to live holy, make wise decisions, and unite His people around a holy passion for what is right and truly glorifying to God. May we not allow our personal preferences and convictions to get in the way of advancing God's

separated work, ministry, and the true fundamentalist cause in these last days. May we not “kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:5), when a church is truly seeking to do what is right (Dan. 1:8), glorifying God, and maintaining a ministry that is pure and driven by a love for truth, the salvation of souls, and God’s holiness. And now we must close this study, remembering what all true separatists agree upon.

“Right is always right,
And wrong is always wrong,
And we must learn to separate the two.
If you love the right, the Lord will give you light;
So seek the right in everything you do.

Do right till the stars fall,
Do right till the last call,
Do right since you love the Lord,
Do right, do right.”