

ASSOCIATION WITH EVIL

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There are groups of Christians who advocate separation from the world and teach that we must not have any association with evil.

The word evil is the word kakos which speaks of evil character and what is base: the other main word is poneros which indicates what is evil in influence and effect, what is malignant.

The word kakos is the opposite of kalos which means fair, advisable and good in character. The word agathos means beneficial, useful and good. The word chrestos means kind and generous, serviceable and therefore is the opposite of what is destructive, injurious or evil. The word kakos also denotes wickedness and depravity and sometimes affliction.

The word kakopoios denotes an evil-doer.

The word poneros is used to describe Satan.

However there is another word for evil which is phaulos which means slight, trivial, common, bad and worthless.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 we are told to abstain from evil and every appearance of it. The Amplified Bible states, "Shrink from it and keep aloof from it in whatever form or whatever kind it may be."

Consider the Scriptures

Exodus 23. 2 Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.

Robert P Gordon, lecturer in Hebrew and Semitic languages, writes that this refers to a legal case where some many be swayed by the crowd and that justice may be perverted.

Exodus 34.12 Take heed to thyself that thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest.

This verse speaks for itself. The land of Canaan had to be dispossessed of the evil people who lived there and who worshipped false gods and indulged in evil practices. Their dispossession was not butchery but surgery.

Psalms 1. 1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

John Biagent tells of those who reject the standards of God by association with those who know not God. They are scornful or scoffers who make light of God's law

Proverbs 4.14 Enter not into the path of the wicked and go not in the way of evil men.

This speaks for itself but has the notion of ungodly men

Proverbs 24.1 Be thou not envious against (of) evil men, neither desire to be with them.

This is also self-explanatory. The wicked may prosper (Psalm 73.12) but the godly must not follow that example for possible prosperity or gain.

1 Corinthians 5.11 But now I have written to you not to keep company, if any man that is called brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortionist with such a one as not to eat.

Paul Marsh refers to this as moral disorders in the church. Corinth was a by-word for immorality with all the debased licentious habits of the Greeks: the Christians in the church had sunk to a very low ebb even extolling themselves with their alleged gifts of tongues and prophecy. Paul had to tell them off for all these things. The Amplified Bible highlights the bad condition of the church and that their boasting is not good but most unseemly and out of place.

2 Corinthians 6.14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? ...and what communion hath light with darkness?

Many have taken the unequal yoke to solely refer to a marriage of a believer with an unbeliever but this is a warning forbidding association with pagans with whom you cannot have fellowship. There is some indication that there may have also been association by church members with pagans in social events. This is a very serious hindrance to fellowship and may make restoration very difficult.

The results of association with evil are misery (Numbers 33.55), apostasy (1 Kings 11.2),

Divine wrath (2 Chronicles 19.2), parental shame (Proverbs 28.7), the denial of Christ (John 18. 18-25), and defilement (1 Corinthians 15.33).

I lament when people refer to Solomon as a type of Christ. 1 Kings 11 tells us that he was evil and his association with pagan women was part of his apostasy.

It must be noted that evil association does not necessarily deal with Christians who are at loggerheads or who have fallen out or hold variations in doctrine.

There are those who believe that Christians who entertain false doctrines should be put out of fellowship or excommunicated. The expression ' out of fellowship ' is wrong and misleading. When I became a Christian over 50 years ago I was in fellowship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus. Some years later, I joined an assembly of believers and was said to have come into fellowship. I had been in fellowship with the Lord for many years.

Of course, I believe that discipline must exist among the Lord's people and where there is blatant false doctrine it must be dealt with.

Among the Jews excommunication was an issue.

Exodus 12. 15 The eating of leavened bread would result in that person being cut off from the people.

Exodus 30.33 The holy oil should only be used to anoint a priest. Its wrongful use led to excommunication of the guilty party.

Leviticus 7.20 if anyone ate the flesh of a peace offering that person would be cut off.

Leviticus 17. 9 A burnt offering or a sacrifice must be brought to the door of the tabernacle to offer it to the Lord. Failure to do so meant excommunication.

Leviticus 23. 29 refers to any violation of the Day of Atonement which would lead to being cut off.

Numbers 9.13 refers to any violation of the ordinance of the Passover.

John 9 refers to the man born blind who was cast out because he defended the Lord who had healed him. This was a wrongful action by Jews and Pharisees.

Palm 37. 9 refers to evildoers being cut off so as not to impede the righteous.

We have referred to 1 Corinthians 5. 11 and those who should be disciplined, or even excommunicated from the church, but there are problems.

The first type of person to be dealt with is the fornicator. The assembly may have suspicions that a brother in the meeting is having illicit sex...that is what the word fornication means. Suspicion is not proof. How do you find proof? Do we keep him under surveillance and wait for him to perform an immoral act? How do you proceed? One thing you cannot do is make a false report and one of the commandments is Thou shalt not bear false witness

Do we excommunicate this brother on suspicion of immorality?

The second type of person is one who is covetous. The word is epithumeo and means the want to desire evilly. It may be in money, clothing, lust or the desire for power as in the case of Diotrephes. Sadly, there are people in assemblies of the Lord's people who want to build empires for themselves and dictate to others.

The third set of people are idolaters. Idolatry is really the sin of the mind against God. The pagans and heathen made sacrifices to demons and false gods. The sins of the flesh are associated with idolatry.

Modern thought has suggested that idolatry is to prefer anything before God. If my house or car is more important to me is that idolatry?

Is television, which, among other things, purveys evil, an association with evil and could be an idol?

The fourth type of person is a railer. One who speaks falsely or speaks with evil; one who blasphemes or reviles; one who speaks badly or harshly of another; a liar; a perverter of justice in speech and attitude. It could be a Diotrephes. It could be someone in the assembly who has a bad attitude to another member.

The fifth type of person is a drunkard and that needs no further comment. The sixth is an extortioner and that needs little comment but it also means the desire to gain an advantage as well as robbery and to take by force.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of the doctrine of Eternal Sonship which states that there was never a time when the Lord Jesus was not the Eternal Son. He was that before the foundation of the world and remains so.

The Bible makes it very clear that all three in the Trinity are eternal and Divine and for anyone to doubt the Deity of Christ is a false doctrine. In fact, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the denial of the Deity of Christ.

But there are people who are sincere and believe in the Eternal Divinity of the Trinity but wrestle with some issues here. Was the Lord Jesus referred to as the Eternal Son in eternity past? Why does John refer to Him as the Eternal Word who was made flesh and why does the Hebrew epistle say that a body was prepared for Him? What is the significance of the words of God in Hebrews "This is my beloved Son; This day I have begotten Thee "?

There was day when the Lord Jesus was begotten. To be begotten is to give birth to. Adam begat his son Cain and so on.

Let me make it clear again. I believe in the Eternal Divinity of all three members of the Trinity. I do not deny the Deity of Christ but I have no answers to the questions mentioned above.

If someone has these questions which they hold in genuine concern do we excommunicate them?

Here is a brother in the meeting who is sincere and loves the Lord but believes that the church will go through the Great Tribulation. He does not make a fuss about this matter but remains gentle and kind.

Do we excommunicate him?

What is the difference between the rules of excommunication concerning the Eternal Sonship debate and belief in the church going through the Great Tribulation?

I have heard it said that a person who denies or is genuinely unsure of the Eternal Sonship must be put out of fellowship and we must have nothing to do with him and yet we can retain the brother and his views about the Great Tribulation. Are either of these matters evil or an association with evil? Who is to be the arbiter in these cases and make a decision that will stand for everybody?

We had a brother in our meeting who had difficulties with the subject of the Virgin Birth. He could not come to grips with it. He did not make a fuss or commotion but wag his head and say, "I can't understand this!"

Do we excommunicate him? Do we chastise him? Do we discipline him? If he stays in our meeting are we associating with evil?

What do we do with a brother in the meeting who is a Diotrephes? He criticises all other brethren and their Gospel preaching and ministry, has a group from the assembly weekly in his home and his preaching is to correct others and he says, "So and so said this, but I tell you the truth he is wrong. What he should have said is... "He displays arrogance and charms his followers. He wants to know all about you and calls this fellowship!

Fellowship is not getting to know you. It is not tea, gossip and cake.

According to W E Vine this man constitutes a heretic. And yet there are churches and assemblies throughout the UK who have a Diotrephes and they are still there!

This is why assemblies have an oversight, a group of elders who pray together and work together and seek the Lord's mind on such issues.

(1980)