

“Withdrawing”

When brothers or sisters among us are overtaken in sin, those who are spiritual seek to restore them (Galatians 6:2). We may instruct, admonish, and rebuke, but if all else fails, we must withdraw ourselves from them (2 Thessalonians 3:6). It is never pleasant, but it is needful to save their souls and to protect the church from evil influences (1 Corinthians 5:6). It is what God commands, hence, Paul said “this we commanded you” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

“Withdrawing” means that we limit our association with brothers or sisters who have resisted the instruction and exhortation of the saints and remain in sin. We should not associate with them in any way that would suggest that they are acceptable to God or to us in their present condition. We must keep no company with them and we must not eat with them (1 Corinthians 5:11). This does not mean that these have become our enemy, but it should make them ashamed of their deeds and bring them to repentance. Paul wrote again, “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

Those withdrawn from can usually live without our association; just robbing them of our presence is not what it is all about. It is the message that withdrawing sends that is important. Withdrawing is a “punishment inflicted by many” (2 Corinthians 2:6). It says that many who are righteous agree that one who professed Christ as Lord has left His way and has refused to return to Him. The righteous withdraw themselves from the one persistent in sin to make it vivid whose company this erring child of God is in — Satan and his servants, hence, “delivered unto Satan” (1 Corinthians 5:5). To know that those who are righteous judge them unrighteous should make them ashamed of their sinful deeds; they should be ashamed to stand in the company of Satan and the world instead of standing with Christ and His righteous ones. Furthermore, those who stand with Satan in this world will suffer in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone with him in the age to come.

Withdrawing is one way God tries to get the attention of His children when they go astray. Some will heed His call, become ashamed, and repent. The hearts of others are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; they never become ashamed of their sins or refuse to repent of them. We should make every effort to save those who err from the truth — even if it means withdrawing from them. If their hearts are right, God’s plan will work.

Adapted from Harold Hancock