

Should Sinners Shun Sinners? (Part 2) - Immoral Behavior

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[First article in series...](#)

Shunning Immoral Behavior

Previously, we examined several references in the Bible showing situations where shunning may be appropriate. For example, God required that people be ostracized for sexually immoral behavior. (Leviticus 18:29; Revelation 2:14, 20; 1 Corinthians 5:11) God's commands are for our benefit even if we do not understand His wisdom. God's commandment to shun defiant sinners is based on "the yeast effect." Yeast is used in the Bible to represent defiance and rebellion. (Luke 12:1; Galatians 5:9) God commanded Israel to observe an object lesson every spring called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. **"For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off [shunned] from Israel."** (Exodus 12:15, insertion mine) The reason why God commanded them to throw all yeast out of the house and eat "yeast free" bread for seven days is that God wanted Israel to understand that sin is like yeast. If a little sin is ignored and left unchecked, it will permeate every aspect of life. (1 Corinthians 5:6) Corporately speaking, God wants His people to be on guard against the evils of gradualism. Given human nature, it is less embarrassing and much easier to "go along to get along." We must be on guard against the relentless encroachment of sin. God said to Cain, **"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."** (Genesis 4:7)

Should Christians Shun Non-Christians?

Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate for Christians to shun non-Christians. For example, it is appropriate for a recovering alcoholic to shun former drinking partners and places where alcohol is easily available. A recovering drug addict should shun friends who sell and use drugs. A person struggling to overcome a sexually immoral relationship should shun their romantic partner. A "born again" Christian with a degenerate past should shun former friends who have no understanding about the new Christian's struggle to please God. Christians struggling with specific temptations from their past must shun non-Christian friends that are associated with those temptations. Paul wrote, **"Do not be misled [do not be stupid]: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'**" (1 Corinthians 15:33, insertion mine) The apostle Peter wrote to some new converts saying: **"For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They [your former friends] think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation [worthless behaviors], and they heap abuse [ridicule] on you. But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached [to you and] even to those who are now [spiritually] dead, so that they might [wake up and] be judged [condemned with**

guilt from the Holy Spirit. For God will judge each of us] **according to** [our deeds as] **men in regard to the body** [whether our deeds were good or evil], **but** [He will forgive our sins if we will wake up and] **live according to God in regard to the Spirit.**" (1 Peter 4:3-6, insertions mine)

Born again Christians know the struggle that goes with living in this world, without becoming a part of this world. James wrote, "**Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.**" (James 1:27) Even though the Christian life is antagonistic toward the ways of the world, Jesus does not want Christians to shun the people of the world. He wants us to shun the practices of the world. If Christians do not go out into the world and make disciples of all nations no one will hear the gospel of Jesus. No one will see God's kindness, patience, and love. No one will learn of God's truth, righteousness, humility, and faithful promises. Jesus told His followers, "**You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven.**" (Matthew 5:13-16)

A Christian cannot have a friend who is a non-Christian friend for long. Two people cannot walk and talk together if their hearts are set on different things. Suppose one person wants to go to a Bible study and the other wants to go to a rock concert. What happens? Suppose one person wants to hang with friends who drink and are sexually immoral and the other finds the behavior of the people and their conversations offensive. What happens? A born again Christian is "a weird duck" in the eyes of a nonbeliever. They cannot understand the enormous gulf that exists between the passions of the sinful nature and higher desires of the born again nature. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Enmity Between You and the Woman

When Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus came quickly to Earth. He called a meeting which included Lucifer, the serpent. Speaking to the devil, Jesus said: "**And I will put enmity** [friction, angst, hostility] **between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He** [the Savior of sinners] **will crush your head** [you will be destroyed someday], **and you will strike his heel** [I will also die in the process]." (Genesis 3:15)

The serpent's offspring represent those controlled by the sinful nature. The woman's offspring represent those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, there has been enmity between these two classes of people. Everyone on Earth belongs to one class or the other. Adam and Eve did not have to wait very long to see this enmity. The story of Cain and Abel illustrates that no middle ground exists between the offspring of Lucifer and the offspring of God. Paul summarized the conflict between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman saying, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and [the gods of this world] Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: **'I will live with them**

and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ ‘Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’ Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

Satan Attacks Our Sinful Nature

We as sinners who are trying to live a spirit-led life, face three enormous disadvantages. First, we have an extremely intelligent enemy who never sleeps. He and his demons are crouched at the door, ready to lead us into temptation in a moment of weakness. Second, every child comes into this world having a sinful nature. We are born with a natural predisposition to be self-centered and rebellious toward God. Rebellion against God is normal. Third, we live in a world where TV and movies make sinful conduct appear interesting and exciting. The media glamorizes sinful ideas and thoughts. Sinful living is common and is the way that almost everyone lives. “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21) Paul told Timothy: **“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. [Shun them,] Have nothing to do with them.”** (2 Timothy 3:1-5, insertion mine)

“Born again” Christians have to be thoughtful about associating and shunning. A wise Christian will not interact with people and situations in which they may encounter temptation. They will not be tempted or attracted to the pleasures of sin. They know the devil lurks in the shadows and has declared war on everyone who claims to be a disciple of Christ. The devil knows our strengths and weaknesses and uses this knowledge to attack us. This is why it is so critical for Christians to abide in Christ. Sin separates us from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Remember mighty Samson sinned and lost all his strength. Jesus said, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** (John 15:5-8)

God Sends the Bible and Holy Spirit

God understands the three disadvantages that every sinner faces and He has three amazing solutions for them. First, He sends the gift of the Holy Spirit to each person. Through the power

of the Holy Spirit, God will do things for us and within us that we cannot do for ourselves. Second, God gives us the Bible so that we can read for ourselves what He has to say. Third, He has paid the price for salvation so that every sinner willing to live by faith will escape the penalty for sin!

The difficult task for the Holy Spirit is to offer every sinner a pair of “spiritual ears” so that sinners can hear God’s very soft voice. If we are willing to receive “spiritual ears,” during the second phase the Holy Spirit will attempt to create a strong desire within us for Biblical truth. If phase two is successful, He leads us into the discovery of Biblical truth. Phase three is where “the rubber meets the road.” The Holy Spirit confronts us with some aspect of truth to see whether we will obey or defy God. Each test is a matter of spiritual life and death. If we refuse to obey the truth, God’s very soft voice will become inaudible. The power of the Holy Spirit will fade. “When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, he will either quit being mistaken or cease being honest.” (Richard J. Humpal, JD) The work of the Holy Spirit in the third phase is one of revealing truth, testing our obedience and taking us one step at a time up the ladder of faith.

Jesus Transforms People

It is proper for church groups to shun people who openly and defiantly practice sexual immorality. It is proper for Christians to shun non-Christians in certain circumstances. Jesus wants His disciples to let their light shine. It is difficult for born again Christians to be in the world without becoming part of the world. **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”** (1 John 2:15-17) A sinner can only get to a place where he does not love the world through faith in Christ. If Jesus sees that we are willing to live by faith, He will tell the Holy Spirit to make this miracle happen.

Born again Christians have an experience and a gospel that is truly exciting. Jesus is willing to transform any sinner who is ready to forsake his sin, but Jesus will only begin the transforming process after we acknowledge our sin and show determination to turn away from it. The Bible says, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John 1:9, italics mine) Like Paul, we can say, **“I have been crucified with Christ [my natural ways and desires were crucified this morning] and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me [today]. The life I [now] live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God [I am trusting Him to give me the attitude I need today, and He will because He], who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** (Galatians 2:20, insertion mine)

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