

For Those Professing to be Christians--But Aren't

It is difficult for Christians to understand why their friends or family members will not yield to the wooing or ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In John MacArthur's series, *My Brother's Keeper*, he discusses what to do when a brother in the church sins based on Matthew 18 ¹.

Step one: we are to approach our sinning brother one on one, advising them of their sin. Step two: we take another witness in the hope that they will repentant of that sin. Step three: we are to take additional people, perhaps elders in the church, getting many others involved for a final attempt of bringing the believer to repentance of their sin, as outlined in the scripture.

Once these steps have been exhausted, if the brother still does not repent of his or her sin, we must discontinue fellowship and put them out of the church. This drastic step in essence hands them over to Satan for a time.

Bob Enyart says that it takes discernment and wisdom as to what relationship we are to maintain with family members and friends². What if he or she is not *in* the church? What if he or she is a direct family member? Do we treat them differently? Do we dishonor God if we avoid others? Do we avoid family or friends even at weddings, funerals, or holidays? The apostle Paul said that immorality must be judged:

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (NKJV)

⁹ I wrote to you in my epistle ^pnot to ⁶keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go ^qout of the world. ¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company ^rwith anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, o ^r covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — ^snot even to eat with such a person.

¹² For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³ But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ^t“*put away from yourselves the evil person.*” ³

1 John MacArthur radio program series My Brother's Keeper
2 2 Bob Enyart radio program 9 July 2007.
p 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6
6 associate
q John 17:15
r Matt. 18:17
s Gal. 2:12
t Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7; 1 Cor. 5 :2

If we were to discontinue fellowship with all unbelievers, there would not be many left in the world with which to associate at all. We are still called to witness to a dying world. The danger lies in fellowship with the professed believer, or a member of the church. We hold our own to a higher responsibility. Enyart says that depending on the degree of sin in the brother's life, it may be appropriate to explain that your relationship with them is a "broken" one.

J. Vernon McGee was famous for saying "I believe in the assurance of the believer and I believe in the non-assurance of the make believer." We would not expect the unbeliever to act like a Christian, but we certainly would expect the professed believer to behave like a Christian.

Paul warns not to keep company with anyone *named a brother* who is living in sin—not even to eat with such a person. MacArthur says that the church must judge its members to remain true to itself. When a church judges its own, it is acting as Christ intended it to act. God judges those outside the church , but it is for us to be concerned first and foremost with our own house.

Forgiveness is an essential part of Christianity as well. If and when a believer repents, we are to forgive him or he r and work to restore their relationship with the body of believers. As there is no salvation before repentance and forgiveness of sin on the macro scale with God, there is no restoration of fellowship before repentance and forgiveness of sin on the micro scale individually with one another.

3 *The New King James Version*. 1982. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.