

Separation from the World by J. C. Ryle

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A Subject of Vast Importance

The verse, *Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord* (2 Corinthians 6:17), points to a subject of vast importance in religion. That subject is the great duty of separation from the world. This is the point which Paul had in view when he wrote to the Corinthians, *Come out . . . and be . . . separate*. The subject is one which demands the best attention of all who call themselves Christians. In every age of the Church, separation from the world has always been one of the grand evidences of a work of grace in the heart. Those who have really been born of the Spirit, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, have always tried to come out from the world and live a separate life. Those who have only had the name of Christian, without the reality, have always refused to come out and be separate from the world. The subject perhaps was never more important than it is at the present day. There is a widely-spread desire to make things pleasant in religion – to saw off the corners and edges of the cross and to avoid self-denial as far as possible. On every side we hear professing Christians declaring loudly that we must not be “narrow and exclusive”, and that there is no harm in many things which the holiest saints of old thought bad for their souls. That we may go anywhere and do anything and spend our time in anything and read anything and keep any company and plunge into anything, and all the while be very good Christians – this is the rule of thousands. In a day like this I think it good to raise a warning voice and invite attention to the teaching of God’s Word. It is written in that Word: *Come out . . . and be . . . separate*. There are three points which I shall try to show my readers in examining this great subject:

1. The world is a source of great danger to the soul.
2. What is not meant by separation from the world.
3. What real separation from the world consists in.

And now, before I go a single step further, let me warn every reader that he will never understand this subject unless he first understands what a true Christian is. If you are one of those unhappy people who think everybody is a Christian who goes to a place of worship, no matter how he lives or what he believes, I fear you will care little about separation from the world. But if you read your Bible and are in earnest about your soul, you will know that there are two classes of Christians: converted and unconverted. You will know that, what the Jews were among the nations under the Old Testament, is what the true Christian is meant to be under the New. You will understand what I mean when I say that there must be a difference between believers and unbelievers. To you therefore I make a special appeal this day. While many avoid the subject of separation from the world and many positively hate it and many are puzzled by it, give me your attention while I try to show you the thing as it is.

1. The World Is a Source of Great Danger to the Soul

By the world, remember, I do not mean the physical world, on the face of which we are living and moving. If someone pretends that anything which God has created, in the heavens above or on the earth beneath, is in itself harmful to anyone's soul, he says what is unreasonable and absurd. On the contrary, the sun, moon and stars; the mountains, valleys and plains; the seas, lakes and rivers; the animals and plants – all are *very good* in themselves (Genesis 1:31). All are full of lessons about God's wisdom and power; all proclaim daily: The hand that made us is divine. The idea that matter is in itself sinful and corrupt is foolish; it is false.

When I speak of the world here, I mean those people who think only, or chiefly, of the things of this world and neglect the world to come – people who are always thinking more of earth than of heaven, more of time than of eternity, more of the body than of the soul, more of pleasing man than of pleasing God. It is of them and their ways, habits, customs, opinions, practices, tastes, aims, spirit and tone that I am speaking when I refer to the world. This is the world from which Paul tells us to come out and be separate. Now the well-known Church Catechism teaches us at its very beginning that the world, in this sense, is an enemy to the soul. It tells us that there are three things which a baptized Christian is bound to give up and three enemies which he ought to fight and resist. These three are the flesh, the devil and the world. All three are terrible foes, and all three must be overcome if we would be saved. But whatever people think about the Catechism, we shall do well to turn to the

testimony of Holy Scripture. If the texts I am about to quote do not prove that the world is a source of danger to the soul, there is no meaning in words.

Let us hear what Paul says:

Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Christ gave Himself for us, that He might deliver us from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4).

In time past ye walked according to the course of this world (Ephesians 2:2).

Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world (2 Timothy 4:10).

Let us hear what James says:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4).

Let us hear what John says:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. (1 John 3:1).

They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them (1 John 4:5).

Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world (1 John 5:4).

We know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness (1 John 5:19).

Let us hear, lastly, what the Lord Jesus Christ says:

The cares of this world choke the Word, and it becometh unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

Ye are of this world: I am not of this world (John 8:23).

The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him (John 14:17).

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you (John 15:18).

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:19).

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world (John 17:16).

I make no comment on these 21 texts. They speak for themselves. If anyone can read them carefully and fail to see that the world is an enemy to the Christian's soul, and that there is an utter opposition between the friendship of the world and the friendship of Christ, he is past the reach of argument and it is waste of time to reason with him. To my eyes they contain a lesson as clear as the sun at noon.

Practical Evidence of the Danger of the World

I turn from Scripture to matters of fact and experience. I appeal to any old Christian who keeps his eyes open and knows what is going on in the Churches. I ask him: Is there anything that damages the cause of religion more than the world? It is not open sin or open unbelief which robs Christ of His professing servants so much as the love of the world, the fear of the world, the cares of the world, the business of the world, the money of the world, the pleasures of the world, and the desire to keep in with the world. This is the great rock on which thousands of young people are continually making shipwreck. They do not object to any doctrine of the Christian faith. They do not deliberately choose evil and openly rebel against God. They hope somehow to get to heaven at last. They think it proper to have some religion. But they cannot give up their idol; they must have the world. And so after running well and bidding fair for heaven while boys and girls, they turn aside when they become men and women, and they go down the broad way which leads to destruction. They

begin with Abraham and Moses and end with Demas and Lot's wife. The last day alone will prove how many souls the world has slain. Hundreds will be found to have missed heaven who were trained in religious families and knew the gospel from their very childhood. They left the harbour of home with bright prospects and launched forth on the ocean of life with a father's blessing and a mother's prayers. But they then got out of the right course through the temptations of the world, and ended their voyage in shallows and in misery. It is a sorrowful story to tell, but sadly it is only too common. I cannot wonder that Paul says, *Come out . . . and be . . . separate*.

2. What is not meant by Separation

This point regarding the world being a source of great danger is one which requires clearing up. Many mistakes are made about it. You will sometimes see sincere and well-meaning Christians doing things which God never intended them to do, in the matter of separation from the world, and honestly believing that they are in the path of duty. Their mistakes often do great harm. They give the wicked the opportunity to ridicule all religion and supply them with an excuse for having none. They cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of and add to the offence of the cross. I think it a plain duty to make a few remarks on the subject. We must never forget that it is possible to be very much in earnest and to think we are "doing God service", when in reality we are making some great mistake. There is such a thing as zeal *not according to knowledge* (Romans 10:2; see also John 16:2). There are few things about which it is so important to pray for right judgement and for sanctified common sense, as separation from the world.

Occupations

When Paul said, *Come out . . . and be . . . separate*, he did not mean that Christians ought to give up all worldly callings, trades, professions and business. He did not forbid men to be soldiers, sailors, lawyers, doctors, merchants, bankers, shopkeepers or tradesmen. There is not a word in the New Testament to justify such a line of conduct. Cornelius the centurion, Luke the physician, Zenas the lawyer are examples to the contrary. Idleness is in itself a sin. A lawful calling is a remedy against temptation. *If any man will not work, neither shall he eat* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). To give up any business of life which is not necessarily sinful, from fear of getting harm from it, is lazy, cowardly conduct. The right plan is to carry our religion into our business, and

not to give up business under the doubtful pretence that it interferes with our religion.

Contact with the unconverted

When Paul said, *Come out . . . and be . . . separate*, he did not mean that Christians ought to decline all contact with unconverted people and refuse to meet them. There is no authority for such conduct in the New Testament. Our Lord and His disciples did not refuse to go to a marriage feast or to sit for food at a Pharisee's table. Paul does not say, *If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast*, you must not go; he only tells us how to behave if we do go (1 Corinthians 10:27). It is also a dangerous thing to begin judging people too closely and concluding who are converted and who are not, and which groups of people are godly and which ungodly. We are sure to make mistakes. Above all, such a course of life would cut us off from many opportunities of doing good. If we carry our Master with us wherever we go, who can tell but we may *save some* and get no harm? (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Non-religious Subjects

When Paul says, *Come out . . . and be . . . separate*, he did not mean that Christians ought to take no interest in anything on earth except religion. To neglect science, art, books and politics; to read nothing which is not directly spiritual; to know nothing about what is going on among mankind and never to look at a newspaper; to care nothing about the government of one's country and to be utterly indifferent as to the persons who guide its counsels and make its laws – all this may seem very right and proper in the eyes of some people. But I allow myself to think that it is an idle, selfish neglect of duty. Paul knew the value of good government, as one of the main helps to our living *a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty* (1 Timothy 2:2). He was not ashamed to quote the words of heathen writers in his speeches and writings. He did not think it beneath him to show that he was acquainted with the laws and customs and callings of the world, in the illustrations he gave from them. Christians who pride themselves on their ignorance of secular things are precisely the Christians who bring religion into contempt. I knew of a blacksmith who would not come to hear his minister preach the gospel until he found out that he knew the properties of iron. Then he came.

Ostentation

When Paul said, *Come . . . out and be . . . separate*, he did not mean that Christians should appear strange in their dress, manners, behaviour and voice. Anything which attracts notice in these matters is most objectionable and ought to be carefully avoided. It is an enormous mistake to wear clothes of such a colour, or made in such a way, that when you go into company every eye is fixed on you. It gives an opportunity to the wicked to ridicule religion, and it looks self-righteous and artificial. There is not the slightest proof that our Lord and His apostles, and Priscilla, and Persis, and their companions, dressed and behaved differently from others in their own ranks of life. On the other hand, one of the many charges our Lord brings against the Pharisees was that of *making broad their phylacteries, and enlarging the borders of their garments* so as to be *seen of men* (Matthew 23:5). True holiness and an outward show of holiness are entirely different things. Those who try to show their unworldliness by wearing clothes which are obviously ugly, or by speaking in a whining voice, or by adopting an unnatural humility and seriousness of manner – they miss their mark altogether and only give an opportunity to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

Monasticism

When Paul said, *Come . . . out and be . . . separate*, he did not mean that Christians ought to leave the company of mankind and shut themselves up in solitude. It is one of the crying errors of the Church of Rome to suppose that great holiness is to be attained by such practices. It is the foolish delusion of the whole army of monks, nuns and hermits. Separation of this kind is not according to the mind of Christ. He says distinctly in His last prayer, *I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil* (John 17:15). There is not a word in the Acts or the Epistles to recommend such a separation. True believers are always represented as mixing in the world, doing their duty in it, and glorifying God by patience, meekness, purity and courage in their various positions, and not by cowardly deserting them. It is also foolish to suppose that we can keep the world and the devil out of our hearts by going into holes and corners. True religion and unworldliness are best seen, not in timidly forsaking the post which God has allotted to us, but in boldly standing our ground and showing the power of grace to overcome evil.

The Church

The reader is warned here against separation from a Church for the wrong reasons, but such separation may be necessary – if, for instance, the Church is on an unscriptural foundation.

Last, but not least, when Paul said, *Come . . . out and be . . . separate*, he did not mean that Christians ought to withdraw from every Church in which there are unconverted members, or refuse to worship in the company of any who are not believers, or to keep away from the Lord's table if any ungodly people go up to it. This is a very common but a very serious mistake. There is not a text in the New Testament to justify it, and it ought to be condemned as a pure invention of man. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself deliberately allowed Judas Iscariot to be an apostle for three years and gave him the Lord's Supper. He has taught us, in the parable of the wheat and tares, that converted and unconverted will be *together till the harvest* and cannot be divided (Matthew 13:30). In Jesus' Epistles to the Seven Churches, and in all Paul's Epistles, we often see faults and corruptions mentioned and reproofed; but we are never told that they justify desertion of the assembly, or neglect of ordinances. In short, we must not look for a perfect Church, a perfect congregation and a perfect company of communicants until the marriage supper of the Lamb. If there are unworthy church members, or unworthy partakers of the Lord's Supper, the sin is theirs and not ours; we are not their judges. But to separate ourselves from Churches, and deprive ourselves of Christian ordinances, because others use them unworthily, is to take up a foolish, unreasonable and unscriptural position. It is not the mind of Christ, and it certainly is not Paul's idea of separation from the world.

Conclusion on Wrong Separation

I commend these six points to the calm consideration of all who wish to understand the subject of separation from the world. Far more might be said about each and all of them than I have space to say here. I have seen so many mistakes made about them, and so much misery and unhappiness caused by those mistakes, that I want to put Christians on their guard. I want them not to take up positions hastily, in the zeal of their first love, which they will afterwards be obliged to give up. I leave this part of my subject with two pieces of advice, which I offer especially to young Christians.

I advise them, for one thing, if they really desire to come out from the world, to remember that the shortest path is not always the path of duty. To quarrel with all our unconverted relatives, to cut off all our friends, to withdraw

entirely from mixed society, to live an exclusive life, to give up every act of courtesy and civility in order to devote ourselves to the direct work of Christ, – all this may seem very right, and may satisfy our consciences and save us trouble. But I suggest it is often a selfish, lazy, self-pleasing line of conduct, and that the true cross and true line of duty may be to deny ourselves and adopt a very different course of action. For another thing, I advise them, if they want to come out from the world, to watch against a sour, morose, unfriendly, gloomy, unpleasant attitude, and never to forget that there is such a thing as winning *without the Word* (1 Peter 3:1). Let them strive to show unconverted people that their principles, whatever others may think of them, make them cheerful, agreeable, good tempered, unselfish, considerate for others, and ready to take an interest in everything that is innocent and of good report. In short, let there be no needless separation between us and the world. In many things, as I shall soon show, we must be separate; but let us take care that it is separation of the right sort. If the world is offended by such separation, we cannot help it. But let us never give the world an opportunity to say that our separation is foolish, senseless, ridiculous, unreasonable and unscriptural.

3. What True Separation Really is

I take up this branch of my subject with a very deep sense of its difficulty. It is very clear that there is a line of conduct which all true Christians ought to pursue with respect to *the world, and the things of the world*. The texts already quoted make that plain. The key to the solution of that matter lies in the word separation. But it is not easy to show what separation consists in. On some points it is not hard to lay down particular rules; on others it is impossible to do more than state general principles and leave everyone to apply them according to his position in life. This is what I shall now attempt to do.

Right and Wrong

First and foremost, if someone desires to come out from the world and be separate, he must steadily and habitually refuse to be guided by the world's standard of right and wrong. The rule of most of mankind is to go with the stream, to do as others do, to follow the fashion, to keep in with the common opinion, and to set your watch by the town clock. The true Christian will never be content with such a rule. He will simply ask, What does Scripture say? What is written in the Word of God? He will maintain firmly that nothing can be right which God says is wrong, and that the customs and opinions of his neighbours can never make that to be a trifle which God calls serious, or that to be no sin

which God calls sin. He will never think lightly of such sins as drinking, swearing, gambling, lying, cheating, swindling, or breaking the Seventh Commandment, just because they are common and many say, "Where is the mighty harm?" That miserable argument, "Everybody thinks so; everybody says so; everybody does it; everybody will be there", goes for nothing with him. His only question is: Is it condemned or approved by the Bible? Even if he stands alone in his village or town or congregation, he will not go against the Bible. If he has to come out from the crowd and take a position by himself, he will not flinch from doing so rather than disobey the Bible. This is genuine scriptural separation.

Leisure Time

He that desires to come out from the world and be separate must be very careful how he spends his leisure time. This is a point which at first sight appears of little importance. But the longer I live, the more I am persuaded that it deserves most serious attention. An honourable occupation and lawful business are a great safeguard to the soul, and the time that is spent on them is comparatively the time of our least danger. The devil finds it hard to get a hearing from a busy man. But when the day's work is over, and the time of leisure arrives, then comes the hour of temptation. I do not hesitate to warn every man who wants to live a Christian life to be very careful how he spends his evenings. Evening is the time when we are naturally disposed to unbend after the labours of the day, and evening is the time when the Christian is too often tempted to lay aside his armour, and so brings trouble on his soul. "Then cometh the devil" and, with the devil, the world. Evening is the time when the poor man is tempted to go to the public house and fall into sin. Evening is the time when the tradesman too often goes to the inn parlour and sits for hours hearing and seeing things which do him no good. Evening is the time which people choose for dancing, card playing and the like and consequently never get to bed till late at night. If we love our souls and would not become worldly, let us mind how we spend our evenings. Tell me how a man spends his evenings, and I can generally tell what his character is. The true Christian will do well to make it a settled rule never to waste his evenings. Whatever others may do, let him resolve always to make time for quiet, calm thought, for Bible-reading and prayer. The rule will prove a hard one to keep. It may bring on him the charge of being unsocial and over strict. Let him not mind this. Anything of this kind is better than habitual late hours in company, hurried prayers, slovenly Bible reading and a bad conscience. Even if he stands alone in his

village or town, let him not depart from his rule. He will find himself in a minority and be thought a peculiar man. But this is genuine scriptural separation.

Business

He that desires to come out from the world and be separate must steadily decide not to be swallowed up in the business of the world. A true Christian will strive to do his duty in whatever position he finds himself, and to do it well. Whether statesman or merchant or banker or lawyer or doctor or tradesman or farmer, he will try to do his work so that no one can find any reason for fault in him. But he will not allow it to get between him and Christ. If he finds his business beginning to eat up his Sabbaths, his Bible reading, his private prayer, and to bring clouds between him and heaven, he will say, "Stand back! There is a limit. Hitherto you may go, but no further. I cannot sell my soul for place, fame or gold." Like Daniel, he will make time for communion with God, whatever the cost may be. Like Henry Havelock, once a well-known soldier, he will deny himself anything rather than not have time for his Bible-reading and his prayers. In all this he will find he stands almost alone. Many will laugh at him and tell him they get on well enough without being so strict and particular. He will not pay any attention to it. He will resolutely hold the world at arm's length, whatever present loss or sacrifice it may seem to involve. He will choose to be less rich and prosperous in this world rather than not to prosper in his soul. To stand alone in this way, to run counter to the ways of others, requires immense self-denial. But this is genuine scriptural separation.

Unlawful Recreations

He that desires to come out from the world and be separate must steadily abstain from all amusements and recreations which are inseparably connected with sin. This is a hard subject to handle, and I approach it with pain. But I do not think I should be faithful to Christ and faithful to my office as a minister if I did not speak very plainly about it, in considering such a matter as separation from the world. Let me then say honestly that I cannot understand how anyone who makes any pretence to real vital religion can allow himself to attend horse races and theatres. Conscience, no doubt, is a strange thing, and every man must judge for himself. One man sees no harm in things which another regards with abhorrence as evil. I can only give my own opinion for what it is worth, and entreat my readers to consider seriously what I say. That to look at horses running at full speed is in itself perfectly harmless, no sensible

man will pretend to deny. That many plays, such as Shakespeare's, are among the ablest productions of the human intellect, is equally undeniable. But all this is beside the question. The question is whether horse racing and theatres, as they are now conducted in England, are not inseparably bound up with things that are downright wicked. I assert without hesitation that they are so bound up. I assert that the breach of God's commandments so accompanies the race and the play, that you cannot go to the amusement without helping sin. I entreat all professing Christians to remember this and to take heed what they do. I warn them plainly that they have no right to shut their eyes to facts which every intelligent person knows, for the unthinking pleasure of seeing a horse race, or listening to actors. I warn them that they must not talk of separation from the world if they can lend their sanction to amusements which are connected with gambling, betting, drunkenness and fornication. These are the things which *God will judge* (Hebrews 13:4); *the end of these things is death* (Romans 6:21). Hard words these, no doubt! But are they not true? It may seem to your relatives and friends very strait-laced, strict and narrow if you tell them you cannot go to the races or the theatre with them. But we must fall back on first principles. Is the world a danger to the soul, or is it not? Are we to come out from the world, or are we not? These are questions which can only be answered in one way. If we love our souls we must have nothing to do with amusements which are bound up with sin. Nothing short of this can be called genuine scriptural separation from the world.

Lawful Recreations

He that desires to come out from the world and be separate must be moderate in the use of lawful and innocent recreations. No sensible Christian will ever think of condemning all recreations. In a world of wear and tear like this, occasional unbending and relaxation are good for all. Body and mind alike require times of lighter occupation, and opportunities for letting off high spirits, especially when they are young. Exercise itself is a positive necessity for preserving mental and bodily health. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made. No wonder the poet says: "Strange that a harp of thousand strings should keep in tune so long!" Anything which strengthens brain and lungs and muscles and makes us more fit for Christ's work, so long as it is not in itself sinful, is a blessing and ought to be thankfully used. Anything which will occasionally divert our thoughts from their usual grinding channel, in a healthy manner, is a good and not an evil. But it is the excess of these innocent things which a true Christian must watch against if he wants to be separate from the

world. He must not devote his whole heart and soul and mind and strength and time to them, as many do, if he wishes to serve Christ. There are hundreds of lawful things which are good in moderation, but bad when taken in excess; what is healthful medicine in small quantities is downright poison when swallowed down in huge doses. In nothing is this so true as it is in the matter of recreations. The use of them is one thing, and the abuse of them is another. The Christian who uses them must know when to stop and how to say "Hold: enough!" Do they interfere with his private religion? Do they take up too much of his thoughts and attention? Have they a secularising effect on his soul? Have they a tendency to pull him down to earth? Then let him hold hard and take care. All this will require courage, self-denial and firmness. It is a line of conduct which will often bring on us the ridicule and contempt of those who know not what moderation is, and who spend their lives in making trifles into serious things and serious things into trifles. But if we mean to come out from the world we must not mind this. We must be "temperate" even in lawful things, whatever others may think of us. This is genuine scriptural separation.

Friendship

Last, but not least, he that desires to come out from the world and be separate must be careful what he allows himself in friendships and close relationships with worldly people. We cannot help meeting many unconverted people as long as we live. We cannot avoid speaking to them and doing business with them, unless we *go out of the world* (1 Corinthians 5:10). To treat them with the utmost courtesy, kindness and charity, whenever we meet them, is a positive duty. But acquaintance is one thing, and intimate friendship is quite another. To seek their society without cause, to choose their company, to cultivate closeness with them, is very dangerous to the soul. Human nature is such that we cannot be much with other people without them having an effect on our own character. The old proverb will never fail to prove true: "Tell me who a man chooses to live with, and I will tell you what he is". The Scripture says clearly: *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed* (Proverbs 13:20). If then a Christian, who desires to live consistently, chooses for his friends those who either do not care for their souls or the Bible or God or Christ or holiness, or who regard them as of secondary importance, it seems impossible for him to prosper in his religion. He will soon find that their ways are not his ways, nor their thoughts his thoughts, nor their tastes his tastes; and that, unless they change, he must give up close friendship with them. In short, there must be separation. Of course

such separation will be painful. But if we have to choose between the loss of a friend and the injury of our souls, there ought to be no doubt in our minds. If friends will not walk in the narrow way with us, we must not walk in the broad way to please them. But let us distinctly understand that the attempt to keep up close friendship between a converted and an unconverted person, if both are consistent with their natures, is an impossibility. All unmarried Christians ought carefully to remember the principle laid down here when they choose a husband or wife. I fear it is too often entirely forgotten. Too many seem to think of everything except religion in choosing a partner for life, or they suppose that everything will somehow come right as a matter of course. Yet when a praying, Bible-reading, God-fearing, Christ loving, Sabbath-keeping Christian marries someone who takes no interest whatever in serious religion, what can the result be but injury to the Christian, or immense unhappiness? Health is not infectious, but disease is. As a general rule, in such cases, the good go down to the level of the bad, but the bad do not come up to the level of the good. The subject is a delicate one, and I do not care to dwell upon it. But I say this confidently to every unmarried Christian man or woman: If you love your soul, if you do not want to fall away and backslide, if you do not want to destroy your own peace and comfort for life, resolve never to marry any person who is not a thorough Christian, whatever the resolution may cost you. You had better die than marry an unbeliever. Stand to this resolution, and let no one ever persuade you out of it. Depart from this resolution, and you will find it almost impossible to come out and be separate. You will find you have tied a millstone round your own neck in running the race towards heaven; and, if saved at last, it will be *so as by fire* (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Conclusion on True Separation

I offer these six general hints to all who wish to follow Paul's advice, and to come out from the world and be separate. In giving them, I lay no claim to infallibility; but I believe they deserve consideration and attention. I do not forget that the subject is full of difficulties, and that scores of doubtful cases are continually arising in a Christian's life, in which it is very hard to say what is the path of duty and how to behave. Perhaps the following bits of advice may be found useful. In all doubtful cases we should first pray for wisdom and sound judgement. If prayer is worth anything, it must be specially valuable when we desire to do right but do not see our way. In all doubtful cases let us often try ourselves by recollecting the eye of God. Would I go to such and such a place or do such and such a thing if I really thought God was looking at me?

In all doubtful cases let us never forget the second coming of Christ and the day of judgement. Would I like to be found in such and such company, or employed in such and such ways? Finally, in all doubtful cases let us find out what the conduct of the holiest and best Christians has been under similar circumstances. If we do not clearly see our own way, we need not be ashamed to follow good examples. I throw out these suggestions for the use of all who are in difficulties about difficult points in the matter of separation from the world. I cannot help thinking that they may help to untie many knots and solve many problems.