

Must We Avoid Them?

What the Bible teaches about cutting off contact with those who depart from the faith

By Greg Nice

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Some of God's people outside and perhaps even inside the Philadelphia Church of God think that the PCG has established a policy regarding cutting off fellowship with members who leave the faith—those the Bible describes as Laodicean—even their own family members. Not having fellowship with Laodiceans is NOT a policy *established* by the PCG. What the PCG does is teach and obey the doctrine established *by God*. Because this is a doctrine of God, it is therefore a policy of the Church; that is, the Church follows God's commands about restricting fellowship with people He has called and impregnated with His Holy Spirit and who then choose to walk contrary to their covenant with God.

The doctrines of the Church of God come directly from the Word of God. Not having fellowship with those who turn away from God is directly commanded from one end of the Bible to the other. The doctrine predates mankind and will continue into the Kingdom of God.

It seems strange to some that God would expect one of His children to stop socializing with his or her own blood-related, physical family members if that person was begotten by God and then turned away. But why should an individual who has counseled for baptism and has studied the Word of God find this strange? Read Matthew 10:35. If you have a red-letter Bible, you will notice the words are in red. These are the words of Jesus Christ, not any man: "For I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law." Verse 36 continues: "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Most of those in the PCG or the Worldwide Church of God who studied prior to baptism were counseled to read Luke 14. Jesus Christ speaking again, says, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (verse 33). "Forsake," according to *Strong's Concordance*, means bid farewell, take leave, send away. Isn't it clear that Christ makes some strong demands for an individual to be His disciple? Starting with verse 26, Christ begins this thought by talking about family, probably because this is one of the hardest things for man to do: place his family secondary to something else. "If any man come to me, and hate [love less by comparison] not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Christ even mentions it before "hating" your own life. Christ is saying, *To follow me, you might have to bid farewell to your own family. You might have to send them away.*

In the baptism covenant in God's Church, the individual agrees to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Master. They embrace what Jesus teaches as the supreme authority in their lives. They agree that no agreement or promise that they have ever made or will make, or any relationship they have, will supersede or intervene in them obeying Jesus Christ. If they have entered into that covenant, they simply cannot ignore what Christ says here in Luke 14 and Matthew 22.

Members of the PCG who are obeying Christ and the doctrine of cutting off contact with Laodicean family members and friends are not doing it lightheartedly. Nor did they enter into their covenant with God lightheartedly. They understood these verses when they agreed to the baptism covenant. They can only presume that their Laodicean family members also understood when they made the same covenant.

They do not now "forsake" (as Luke 14 says) their family out of vengeance; they forsake them out of love. The Laodiceans entered into the very same covenant with God, and their eternal lives are at stake! If they do not return to the covenant, not only will they be cut off now, but they will not have fellowship with their loved ones for *eternity!* PCG members follow the doctrine of God and cut off fellowship with baptized family members at this time to send a strong warning that they need to repent. PCG members are not interested in just having a relationship with blood family members for the next 5, 10, 20 or 50 years in this physical life only. They are interested in having a relationship with their family members for eternity! God's people are driven by the vision of *eternity* with God, not the present.

When a person enters the baptism covenant with God the Father and Jesus Christ, there are only two possible outcomes. One is eternal life in God's Kingdom. The other is eternal death. Please read Hebrews 6:4-6 and 2 Peter 2:20. The *reason* for cutting off contact with family who are forsaking God is to encourage them to WAKE UP to the disastrous choice they are making!

Look at the biblical examples that relay the doctrine of avoiding fellowship with those who have turned away from God.

Lucifer

Before man even existed, God created the angels. He created one archangel named Lucifer. Look at the description of this magnificent being, whom God must have loved dearly and surely poured much of Himself into making.

"[E]very precious stone was thy covering Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so Thou wast perfect in thy ways ..." (Ezekiel 28:13-15). God *loved* Lucifer! He had to have had a great love and deep, outgoing concern for Lucifer.

But Lucifer sinned and rebelled. What did God do? Verse 16 tells us: "... I will cast thee as profane *out of the mountain of God*" God loved Lucifer, but when he refused to follow God and obey Him, God separated Himself from Lucifer. So cutting off, forsaking a loved one predates mankind!

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve were the first human beings God created (Genesis 3:20). What a wonderful experience that must have been for God, to bring human life into existence. Like a loving Father, He wanted to provide for and protect and teach His children. The love He must have had for them surely cannot be measured by human standards.

But they *rebelled*. How did this loving Father handle that? "Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden So he drove out the man ...;" (verses 23-24).

Adam and Eve rebelled, and God turned away from them. He drove them out of the garden and even placed cherubim to guard the entrance! God was in the garden (Genesis 3:8), and He would not have fellowship with Adam and Eve. Cutting off and forsaking a loved one applied to the very first couple, and God Himself did it.

Cain

Cain slew his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). God said in verse 12 that Cain would be a fugitive and a vagabond on the Earth. In verse 14, Cain said, "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid"

Notice verse 16: "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD" God separated Cain from the rest of Adam's family. He commanded that Cain withdraw from the rest of the family. Cain was not repentant, and God had him cut off. God clearly instructed the first family how a person like Cain is to be dealt with. He was cut off and forsaken by his own family.

Other Old Testament Examples

At the time of Genesis 17, circumcision was required by God. If you did not get circumcised, you were cut off—not allowed to fellowship with God's people (verse 14). What had the uncircumcised done to cause them to be cut off? They had broken God's covenant. Did God hate them? No, He loved them and wanted them to repent. He wanted their inability to fellowship with the family of Israel to *bring them to repentance*. If someone disobeys the covenant, in order to help them realize their sin, you are to cut off and forsake the guilty one. That is what God taught the covenant people.

In Leviticus, God gave a punishment for worshiping pagan gods: "... I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people" (Leviticus 20:5-6). God warned the Israelites ahead of time, *if you disobey me and get involved in worshiping Molech, then I will have you cut off from the rest of the nation*. God's instruction to the nation was very clear ahead of time.

Three chapters later, God teaches Israel about the holy day of Atonement: "And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people" (Leviticus 23:28-29). God's people today are not cutting off friends and family who know nothing about the Day of Atonement. But those who have been baptized and understood and kept the holy days—then turned around and forsook them—God says to cut off. God says that if His people do not afflict themselves, if they do not fast on that day, then those who still obey God are to cut them off. He is teaching that if those individuals do not want to be at one with Him, then His covenant people should not be at one with them, because He is not. When it comes to the holy days, God's command is to forsake those who forsake Him.

Miriam spoke against Moses in Numbers 12:1-2, 7-8. Evidently she did not have a repentant attitude. What was God's response? (verses 9-15). The loving God said to put her out of the camp of Israel. She had to be *cut off* from fellowship. Notice something, though. This was only

a *temporary* measure—and *that is what God wants* from this doctrine! God wants the forsaking to lead to REPENTANCE so the separation will only be temporary.

There are more examples. In Exodus 12:15, God says that if you eat leavened bread during the feast of Unleavened Bread, you are to be cut off for disobeying God. Many Laodiceans are now ignoring the feast of Unleavened Bread after observing it for years. In Exodus 31:14, God says that if you are one of His people and you work on the Sabbath day, you are to be cut off from among His people. God is clear that anyone who forsakes Him and disobeys Him and does not repent is to be forsaken—to *bring them to repentance*.

These are a few of the Old Testament commands to separate from others who are not walking with God. Let's look at some New Testament examples.

New Testament Examples

Paul says we are not to keep company with any man that is a brother if he is a fornicator or an idolater (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). What is a "brother"? A brother in Christ is someone who has entered into the same covenant with God that you have: He has been baptized and has dedicated his life to God.

What does it mean "not to keep company"? Don't eat with them; don't share a social event with them. Don't involve yourself in some casual situation with them. Don't allow them to think that they can become a spiritual fornicator or idolater and everything will be okay and normal.

The Bible says very specifically in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 that there would be a great falling away, an apostasy, a defection from the truth in the end time. What were God's people to do when this happened? Verse 15 tells us they were to *stand fast and hold to the traditions which they had been taught*.

But what about people who joined the defection from the truth and started walking against the traditions and teachings of the Church? 2 Thessalonians 3:6: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions which he received of us." *Withdraw yourselves*. You can't withdraw from someone and keep having a relationship with them at the same time. Paul said: *We command you by the authority of Jesus Christ*. This was not Paul's policy!

The Church also had specific instructions about members who caused offenses contrary to the doctrine. Romans 16:17 says that if an individual does this, the covenanted Christian is to avoid him. That would include family. If they no longer attend services, do not tithe, do not observe the holy days, disobey God and reject His teachings, that is an offense to God and to God's people.

Did some men teach heresy in the early New Testament Church, like some men did in Herbert W. Armstrong's day and like some men do today? Titus 3:10 shows that they did. If a man has strayed from the truth and is teaching heresy, the Christian is commanded to *reject* him. *Strong's* says "reject" means decline, shun, avoid.

In the Future

What about the future? After God establishes His government on Earth, what will be the doctrine then?

The Bible tells us. Revelation 22:13-15 say that those who do His commandments have the right to the tree of life—eternal life! But “without” are those who lie and are idolaters and are not keeping God’s commandments. Once again, the author and finisher of our faith separates the two. One cannot coexist with the other.

Revelation 20:15 says that those not written in the book of life are *permanently* cut off. They are cast into the lake of fire and consumed. Each person who comes to that end was created by God. He loves those people more than we love our parents or our children. Yet God will cut them off for *eternity*. That is why He commands that we forsake them today: so they will wake up from forsaking Him—so that they will repent and not be cut off for eternity!

The entire reason God instituted and ordained this doctrine is *love*. God is love, and these are His words. The reason He stated them and preserved them for us is because He desires that all men come to salvation. God is not frivolous with those to whom He decides to impart His Holy Spirit. If He called and gave your grandparent, parent, sibling or cousin the Holy Spirit, it is because He knew he or she could and should overcome Satan, society and self and become one of the firstfruits in His Kingdom.

So when God sees such a person turn away from Him, what would He do? Would God expect those who are holding fast to His truth to treat casually those who reject Him and His doctrines and commands? Would He expect those who continue obeying Him to show those who have turned away from Him an attitude of contentment? Would it be God’s desire that His people display a casual attitude about His other begotten children who are heading down a road that leads to eternal death? If we act nonchalantly about Laodiceans forsaking God, and those Laodicean friends and family end up in the third resurrection to eternal death, what if we saw them? How would we answer them if they asked, *Why didn't you say or do something to WARN me?* Surely they would find no comfort in the response, *Well, you see, I didn't want you to have any hard feelings toward me.*

If we *fail* to avoid them or cut them off today, we are really doing it because we love *ourselves*, not because we truly love them. We would have to say, *I didn't want to experience any hostility from you, so I ignored what the God of love instructed me to do.* We must have the Kingdom of God vision, not be motivated by the here and now. Our desire is to have the relationship with them for *all eternity*, not just for a few more fading physical years.

We must have faith that God had these instructions recorded in His Word for a reason. And we must obey God in this matter. It is a doctrine of God; it is not a policy of any man’s organization that we might like to consider optional.

A number of God’s faithful people have family and friends who have turned away from God. We should love them as God loves them. Let’s follow His doctrine and avoid them until—and so that—they repent. God’s way will lead to repentance. Doing it our way only leads to death. Forsaking, cutting off, stopping fellowship with those brethren who are walking contrary to God’s way is the best for everyone involved because it is emulating the love of God.