

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

Good morning, everybody. Wonderful to be together and to talk about the state of the church. Obviously a lot could be said, and I know you who are in ministry are always analyzing that—not only your own church but the larger church, in trying to make the church conform more to the Word of God and to the will of the head of the church, the Lord Christ. To be assigned the task of talking about the state of the church opens up all kinds of possibilities. So I had to narrow everything down, and I've narrowed it down to a particular portion of Scripture that we'll get to in a moment.

Over the last number of weeks, and even months, I've been preaching from this pulpit on the invisible kingdom, trying to distinguish for our congregation and those around the world who are listening, the difference between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness; and obviously, they're diametrically opposed to each other. We've tried to help many new people who've been coming to our church to understand the foundational realities of what the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of light is all about. And it comes down to, I think, two defining statements. One in John 18, where Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight so that I would not be delivered over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not from here." So it is a kingdom that exists parallel to the kingdom of this world, to the kingdom of darkness—but it doesn't mingle.

And the other thing that our Lord said is in the seventeenth chapter of Luke, where He said, "The kingdom of God is in your midst." And that is to say that the kingdom is here because the King is here; and wherever the King reigns, the kingdom exists. And that means it comes down to individual believers' hearts, as well as the collective believers in the church. So we are, as it were, a kingdom here in the world—not of the world, alien to the world, existing in a parallel universe, imperceptible to the world.

The apostle Paul said, "It is not manifest what we are because there has not been the glorious manifestation of the children of God." The world looks at us, and they don't understand that we are eternally the people of God—that we have been redeemed, that we are indwelt by the King, and that we belong to the eternal kingdom. They can't distinguish that. In the natural sense, that's not possible. What is possible is for them to hate everything about us, everything about the kingdom of light.

So I've been trying over the last weeks to help our people separate themselves from the world foundationally, in terms of their identity. Because what is, in my mind, the single greatest error in the church is its partnership with the world. This is nothing new, and it takes different forms in every period of history. So I want to talk about the need for the church to understand that it cannot partner with the world in any real sense. We'll talk about that from a number of passages.

So let's begin by looking at Matthew 16, Matthew 16. We'll pick up the very familiar story of Peter's confession in verse 13. "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" That is the highest moment of

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

Peter's life. Every one of us could wish to have the Lord say to us, "What you have spoken is directly from heaven."

"Blessed are you, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." That is the high point of Peter. Such a high point, the Lord says, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I'll build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I'll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

I mean, these are stunning, stunning identifications given to Peter. He is part of the foundation of the church. He is given the keys to the kingdom. That is to say, he can tell people how to enter the kingdom and what will cause them to be shut out of the kingdom. He is given that kind of delegated authority from God. This is Peter's high point; he is speaking from God, and that is God's own testimony.

In an immediate contradiction to that, you come to verse 21: "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan!'"—in the space of six inches, he goes from speaking for God to representing Satan—"You're a stumbling block to Me; for you're not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." This is the ultimate low point in Peter's life; from the high point to the low point in two adjacent passages.

"Get behind Me, Satan!" Mark that Jesus said that to an apostle—the leading apostle, the apostle who would be an eyewitness to the Resurrection, the apostle who would preach the first sermon in the founding of the church on the day of Pentecost, the apostle who would be the preacher through the first half of the book of Acts. "Get behind Me, Satan!" That's strong language; and the Lord uses the verb *hupagō*, "be gone." It's a fierce rebuke. And it appears another place in Matthew: in the fourth chapter and the tenth verse, when Satan came to tempt Jesus, and Jesus said the same thing to the devil. Jesus said to Peter exactly what He said to Satan. And that's why He follows it up by saying, "You are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." The most fierce rebuke: "You have taken up the devil's agenda."

The temptation was the same. What was Satan's temptation? To give to the Lord the kingdoms of the world without the cross, right? The crown without the cross, the kingdom without the cross. "Bow down to me, and I'll give You all those things." The devil is still saying that, and he's saying it to evangelicals. You can avoid the offense, you can avoid the hostility, you can avoid the persecution, you can adjust the message, and you can have the kingdom without the cross. You can have the crown without the cross. This is the most devastating rebuke that ever came out of the lips of the Lord toward a disciple: "You have taken up Satan's cause." You are in partnership with the devil when you think there's going to be a crown without a cross, when you think you're going to accomplish the purpose of advancing the name of Christ through the gospel without suffering.

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

Everything that could be identified under the term pragmatism is designed to eliminate the suffering. And our Lord says, “You’re a stumbling block to Me.” Peter means “stone.” “Upon this rock I’ll build My church.” Peter goes from a stone, to a rock, to a stumbling stone.

If you want to get in the way of the purposes of God, take up the devil’s cause to advance the kingdom without the conflict, to advance the kingdom without the suffering, to advance the kingdom without the cross. “You are not setting your mind on God’s interests but man’s.” The worst rebuke, of course, for this loving disciple who just wants to help Jesus. Right? Just wants to help Jesus, help Him avoid suffering. And the devil’s way is always that—to try to get Christians to think that the kingdom of light can advance without suffering by making certain concessions and compromises with the dark kingdom.

Peter’s sin has been repeated incessantly throughout all of church history, and it’s being done today. Christians have been trying to help Jesus build His kingdom by striking deals with the devil. Every effort to advance the kingdom by means of any worldly scheme is doing the devil’s work.

Jesus said, “They hate Me because I tell them their deeds are evil,” [John 7:7](#). In [John 15:18–23](#), He says, “If they hated Me, they’ll hate you.” This goes with the territory. But there’s always this propensity among weak leaders to try to eliminate the hostility. Good intentions, and maybe even love for Christ, prompting efforts to advance the kingdom by political lobbying, pragmatism, social change, shallow gospel, entertainment, emotional manipulation, acceptance of sin. All of that is to cross over into the darkness and do the devil’s work.

Our Lord’s way is to stay on the side of the kingdom of light; and there is a hard line between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. In 2 Corinthians chapter 10 there’s a definitive passage that I’ll have you look at for a moment. Second Corinthians chapter 10—and you’re familiar with it—verses 3 through 5, where the apostle Paul says though we are human, in verse 3, we don’t use human weapons. We can’t make spiritual war with human weapons, human strategies. The weapons of our warfare are not human, “not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.”

Rather than make an alliance with things raised up against the knowledge of God, we smash them, we crush them, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience. This simplifies the life in the kingdom, which is total, complete obedience to Christ. And anything raised up against the knowledge of God, against obedience to Christ, we bring the truth to bear on that as if we were crushing fortresses—ideological fortresses called speculations and lofty things raised up against the knowledge of God. Our job is not to make alliances with the world and think in so doing we can advance the kingdom, as if Satan were coming alongside Christ to aid Him in the building of His church.

All that is in the world is passing away, right?—1 John. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” It’s all got a very short shelf life. [James 4:4](#), “Friendship with the world is”—what?—“enmity with God.”

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

The kingdom of light needs no help from the devil's kingdom. We don't need a lobby group in Washington lobbying with some kind of bizarre notion that somehow, politicians can help us advance the name of Jesus Christ. It's irrelevant what the laws in any country are, this one or any other country; they have nothing to do with the kingdom of light. Doesn't matter what laws are made or not made, what laws benefit the kingdom at least in a temporal sense, and what laws make it more difficult to be a Christian. They have zero effect on the building of the church. Jesus said, "I'll build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me; I'll lose none of them, but raise them at the last day." Christ will triumph. "We," says Paul in 2 Corinthians 2, "we always triumph in Christ Jesus"—right?

It has no partnership with the world. We don't need to seek the world's attention. We don't need to buy into the world's interests, as if somehow doing that opens a way for people to be saved, when the only thing that we need to do to bring the elect to salvation is to preach the gospel. Our Lord's way is to stay on the side of the light. Evangelicalism has become like Peter, offering a better way than bold, uncompromising, compassionate, loving, proclamation of the gospel that offends the sinner—that offends the sinner, and seeks to break the sinner's comfort and contentment by bringing him into stark realization of the eternal judgment of God.

But evangelicals have become like Peter; they're looking for alliances with Satan that they think somehow can aid the kingdom. I told our congregation a few weeks ago that I could never really concern myself with religious freedom. I wouldn't fight for religious freedom because I won't fight for idolatry. Why would I fight for the devil to have as many false religions as possible, and all of them available to everyone? Well, people would say, "That's a terrible thing to say. What about Christianity?" Christianity advances whether there's religious freedom or not. And there'll always be religious freedom for all the lies. Every false religion is going to be free because it's linked to the kingdom of darkness that operates in the world. And Christians—whatever the label of religious freedom might be in its broadest sense—Christians are always the target, even with religious freedom, of the hostility of sinners.

The apostles turned the world upside down with no help from it, no social action, no alliances. The evil kingdom of darkness hates what God loves and loves everything God hates, and the kingdom of darkness is never a friend to the light. Evil rulers have exchanged the truth of God for a lie—for lies—and they function under the ultimate liar: Satan himself, who is a liar and the father of lies. There is absolutely no reason for us to make any alliance with him—and I'll spell that out a little more as we go. All godless rulers are previews of Antichrist; read [Revelation 13:1–9](#). All godless rulers are previews of Antichrist.

So we have two kingdoms: one, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of truth, the kingdom of Christ; the other, the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of lies, the kingdom of Antichrist. So what is the church's mandate in the world? There are a number of passages we could look at. Let me draw you to Ephesians chapter 5 because it spells it out, Ephesians 5, and we can pick it up in verse 5.

"For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolator, has an inheritance into the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth).” Verse 7, “Do not be partakers with them.” You have no alliance with the kingdom of darkness—that would be just, or righteous. “Don’t be deceived,” verse 6, “with empty words.” Don’t be in any alliance with the kingdom of darkness.

In Colossians chapter 2 verse 6: “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete.”

Chapter 3, familiar words: “If you’ve been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth.” And even down in verse 12: “You have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to the Lord. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” That is the sum of your life: is related to God and to Christ. Everything, everything in your life is related to the One who reigns in the kingdom of light.

Now we could talk about those passages, but it’s another one that I really want you to look at with me: 2 Corinthians chapter 6. And a very familiar passage, but I think overlooked, to the detriment of the church, certainly in this period of time. [Second Corinthians 6:14](#). I’ve a lot to say, and I’ll try to squeeze it in in whatever amount time we have here.

The opening statement of verse 14 doesn’t need a lot of explanation: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers.” Is that hard to get, hard to grasp? “Do not be bound together with unbelievers.” It’s an unqualified statement: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.” Then verse 1 of chapter 7, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” And the defilement is the defilement of those alliances.

Two opposing kingdoms: one, marked by righteousness, light, Christ, believers, and God; the other marked by lawlessness, darkness, Belial, unbelievers, and idols. There is no possibility of bringing these two kingdoms together in any partnership, any fellowship, any harmony, any

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

mutual benefit. One is old, the other is new. One is earthly, the other is heavenly. One is deadly, the other is enlivening. One is material, the other is spiritual. One is full of lies, the other is truthful.

So the command, then, in verse 14: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers.” That doesn’t mean you should divorce an unbeliever. Paul addresses that, doesn’t he? First Corinthians 7. It doesn’t mean isolation because Paul himself says, “I’m all things to all men, that I might by all means win some.” And Jesus says in John 17 in His high-priestly prayer, “I do not ask, Father, that You remove them from the world, but that You keep them from the evil one.” So we’re not talking about isolation, we’re talking about being bound together.

Now look at that, because it’s really very important. It means unequally yoked; and that’s, I think, the Authorized translation, and it’s a good one because this comment, this command really, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers,” is a prohibition based on [Deuteronomy 22:10](#). And [Deuteronomy 22:10](#) says, “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” You can’t plow a straight furrow with two different beasts with two different natures, two different gaits, two different dispositions, that are designed two different ways.

You can’t connect in a common cause, that’s the idea. You can’t connect in a common cause. This is not new. Jeremiah addressed this in one of the most wonderful passages in Jeremiah. Chapter 2; listen to this: “Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, “I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth”’” —speaking to Jewish people— ““I remember the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first of His harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; evil came upon them,” declares the Lord.”

“Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord, ‘What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me . . . ?’” There was a time when you were like a bride, and you were enjoying intimacy and the blessing of our relationship, and you were protected by Me. What happened? What happened? Why did you go far from Me “and walk after emptiness and become empty? They didn’t say, ‘Where is the Lord who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, and of drought and deep darkness, through a land that no one crossed, and where no man dwelt?’ I brought you into the fruitful land to eat its fruit and good things. But you came and defiled My land, and My inheritance you made an abomination. The priests didn’t say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ And those who handle the law didn’t know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me” —and here’s the specific indictment — “the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that did not profit.” Deviation from their relationship with the true God.

“‘Therefore I will contend with you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and with your sons I will contend.’” And at the end of the chapter He says this: “My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Why do God’s people do that? Why did they defect to the world? This is nothing new; this was the story of Israel as well as the sad history of the church.

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

And Satan always seeks to disrupt the work of God, and does that by joining the church to the kingdom of darkness. It's in the parables of Matthew 13 where Jesus says the devil will come and sow tares among the wheat—or by seducing. Either the devil sows unbelievers in the church or seduces the church to make alliances with the world.

The current dominating interest of the defective church is in the realm of racism, feminism, and homosexuality; and this has created massive chaos in evangelicalism. The kingdom of light joining the racist, bitter, vengeful, graceless philosophy of CRT, intersectionality, systemic racism, feminism spawned out of the Enlightenment 300 years ago by God-hating, Christ-rejecting, anti-family, anti-Christian atheists who were driven by bizarre sexual passions. All you have to do is read Philip Johnson's book *The Intellectuals* to know that those philosophers were some of the most deviant people who ever rose to intellectual power.

But all the issues that they generated on the social level have now become the interest of the church. The church is endeavoring to partner with the world in its effort to fix things that aren't right on the planet. And we all know there are plenty of things wrong. That's not new. Genesis 6, when the Lord looked at the earth, all He saw was "evil continually," right? And "only evil continually."

So if you're going to fix the planet, you've got a pretty big job. If you're going to make all the social ills right, if you're going to fix every abuse, that is a very challenging problem—particularly if you don't do anything to change the people, because you will find that sinful people will sin. If you put a barrier up in one category to prevent a sin, they'll just deviate into another category where sin finds life.

So what is the church doing in joining common cause with the world, common cause with its distortions of truth and reality, with its God-hating, Christ-rejecting attitudes? Paul's passage here is very, very powerful, so let's dig in a little bit. I want you to look at it from the three views that are the most obvious: past, present, and future. He's making reference to the past, if only in an oblique sense, when we open with verse 14: "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." Again, I draw that from [Deuteronomy 22:10](#); and that takes me to the Old Testament. Let's look at the past.

What was God's attitude toward alliances between His people and the world in the past? Well, the Old Testament is filled with prohibition. Let's go back and look at some of them, just so we get the full picture. There are a lot of places to go, but let's start with the twenty-third chapter of Exodus, the twenty-third chapter of Exodus and verse 31: "I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, you will drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

Now we have laid out there the reality that God says to Israel, "You need to remove them from the land because you can't survive their presence." That's how powerful and seductive the ungodly world is, even to the people of God. You need to conquer them. You need to destroy them. You need to chase them out because you can't survive if they're still there. That's how powerful and seductive the world is.

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

In the thirty-fourth chapter of Exodus and verse 12, “Watch yourselves that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you’re going, or it’ll become a snare in your midst. But rather, you are to tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, cut down their Asherim—for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, they will play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods. You shall make for yourselves no molten gods.” In other words, this is so powerful and seductive that the very presence of these idolaters will lure you and suck you in.

In Deuteronomy chapter 7, as they stood on the brink of entering into the land of promise, there’s a reiteration of these warnings: “When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering”—chapter 7, Deuteronomy—“to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.” This is extreme action on the part of God to protect His people from the powerful seductive influences of the kingdom of darkness.

“Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. And thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

“The Lord did not set His love on you or choose you because you were more in number than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all people”—and then this amazing statement—“but because the Lord loved you.” The Lord loves you; because He loves you, He desires to protect you, and that means He’s going to destroy all those around you who could seduce you into the darkness. That’s His will for you: that you be that protected. Obviously we know they didn’t do that. They didn’t isolate, they didn’t destroy those people, they didn’t get them out of the land. And, of course, they became idolaters.

Isaiah 30: “‘Woe to the rebellious children,’ declares the Lord, ‘who execute a plan, but not Mine’”—that sounds like Matthew, doesn’t it? “Your interest is in, not God’s, but man’s agenda”—“who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin; who proceed down to Egypt without consulting Me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh”—this is getting political protection for the people of God—“seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!” How bizarre is that? “Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation. For their princes are at Zoan and their ambassadors arrive at Hanes. Everyone will be ashamed because of a people who cannot profit them, who are not for help or profit, but for shame and for reproach.” All you’re going to get out

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

of alliances with Egypt is shame and reproach, and you're going to make clear to the world who's watching that you do not trust your God.

So in chapter 31 he says, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, and they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord! Yet He also is wise and will bring disaster and does not retract His words, but will arise against the house of evildoers and against the help of the workers of iniquity. Now the Egyptians are men and not God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit; so the Lord will stretch out His hand, and he who helps will stumble and he who is helped will fall, and all of them will come to an end together." You get nothing from an alliance with the world. You get nothing from trusting in worldly leaders, politicians.

So that's the past view implied by verse 14. Let's go back to 2 Corinthians: "Do not be bound together," unequally yoked, "with unbelievers." That reminds us of those Old Testament prohibitions. And you know that God did so many things to isolate Israel: They had dietary laws; they had clothing requirements; they had calendar requirements. All of those things were an effort to keep them protected from the darkness, which eventually, sadly, engulfed them.

Now let's move into the present tense, okay? So Paul is now speaking to us, to the church: "What partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God." Present tense, five comparisons. It's almost like you want to say, "OK, I get it."

Before you get to number five, five comparisons speak to the issue of life in the church: "What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?" "Partnership" is *metochē*. It's used only here in the New Testament, but it's related to a word that is used in Luke 5 to speak of Peter's business partners in fishing, and it's used in Hebrews chapter 3 to speak of our union with Christ. So this is a partnership that is a genuine partnership in a common effort, a common effort. It's not as if you're sitting next to somebody watching something; it's partnership in a common effort. Righteousness can have no partnership with lawlessness. [Matthew 7:23](#), Jesus—and you remember this well—said, "You will never ever enter into My kingdom because you are lawless, you are lawless."

In 1 John chapter 3, that definitive distinction between the people of the darkness and the people of light goes like this: "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil. . . . No one who is born of God practices sin, because the seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he's born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who doesn't love his brother." Mutually exclusive.

So the first statement is, "What alliance, what common cause can righteousness have with lawlessness?" Secondly, "What fellowship has light with darkness?" The first one has to do with character. Character is manifest by righteousness or lawlessness. This one goes a little deeper and

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

has to do with nature. “What fellowship”—*koinōnia*—“has light with darkness?” These things are by definition opposites. “Light” is a metaphor for truth and virtue; “darkness” is a metaphor for lies and iniquity.

Children of light and children of darkness together in some kind of cause? Not possible. Not possible with the view of advancing the kingdom. You can be in a business together, you can be on a team together, you can work together—but you can’t engage in a common alliance with the view of advancing the kingdom.

So, first of all, he’s referring to behavior (righteousness and lawlessness). And then he goes back to character (light and darkness). And then he speaks of power. What is the difference between the two power sources? What harmony? And that is actually the word *sumphōnēsis*, from which we get symphony.

“What harmony has Christ with Belial?” Now you’re talking about power. What alliance does the power of Christ need to make with the power of the devil? Belial is an ancient name for Satan. It means worthless. It’s used about twelve times in the Old Testament. It’s unthinkable that you would link up Satan with Christ. Unthinkable that you would somehow think, as a believer preaching the gospel, “You need to make an alliance with atheistic, godless, Christless, vengeful, hate-filled, racist ideology.” And think those two go together. And go so far as to say, “That’s part of the gospel.”

That’s impossible. You don’t advance the kingdom of God by any alliance with any common cause in the world, even those that may have some elements of validity. The only way the world is ever going to change is when the hearts of people change, right? The Lord wants us to view cooperation with the world in this way: It’s joining Christ to Satan.

Or, he says, “What has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” So we go from the behavior (righteousness and lawlessness), to the character (light and darkness), to the power (Christ and Belial), to the means. The world operates by sight; we operate by faith. What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? They operate purely on the temporal level; we operate on the spiritual level. For Christians who live by faith in the Lord, our trust is in Him, our faith is in Him, and that’s why we don’t swap the fountain of living waters for broken pots. It offers us nothing. We function in the supernatural by the power of God, the power of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. All that the world can do is function on a natural level. We trust in God; they trust in themselves. We trust in the Spirit; they trust in the flesh. They trust in political power, military power, ideological force, financial power; we trust in God.

And lastly, there’s opposite identities. That’s a big word, “identity.” He says, “What agreement has the temple of God,” verse 16, “with idols?” This is like in Ezekiel 8. Remember when Ezekiel had a vision of the Temple, and he saw scribblings of idols in the Temple, and then he saw false gods in the Temple. It’s like in 1 Samuel 4 through 6, where the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant, and they put it in the house of Dagon; and God will not be alongside an idol. You remember the story: The idol was knocked over the next morning. When they came back the next morning they set it up, and the next morning after that it was knocked over, and its head was cut off and it was dismembered.

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

We have no agreement. “We are the temple of the living God.” We are the temple of the living God. What an amazing statement: “temple of the living God.” What does the temple of the living God have to do with idols? What agreement? That means union. “Temple” here is naos—means the Holy of Holies. We are the temple, right? Spirit of God dwells in us. [John 14:20](#), Jesus said those amazing words: “I’m in the Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

“Identity” is a buzzword, isn’t it, today? Everybody wants to talk about racial identity, sexual identity, gender identity. Well we have an identity too, and that is we are the temple of the living God. It is true; I am not what I appear. I appear as a man, but that is my material identity. My true, unseen, actual identity is that I am the temple of the living God. Christ is in me; Christ lives in me. And I cannot join Christ to an idol. Paul even talks about not joining Christ to a harlot, doesn’t he?

So “don’t be bound together with unbelievers.” Don’t be bound together as the righteous with the lawless. Don’t be bound together as the light with the darkness. Don’t be bound together as those who are Christ’s with Satan. Don’t be bound together with idolators when you “are the temple of the living God.” You cannot do any of those things and advance the kingdom.

There’s one more climactic truth, and it’s in the last section here. And it’s the future. And this has been overlooked a lot I think, so this might be a fresh insight for you. Picking it up in verse 16, where “God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord, ‘and do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty. Therefore, having these promises.” These are promises: “I will, I will, I will, I will,” four times—four times. These are promises.

You notice there that these are quotes from the Old Testament, right? And they are a mosaic of Old Testament promises to the people of God—listen carefully—related to the kingdom. Did you get that? Related to the kingdom. Christ’s millennial kingdom. They’re drawn out of kingdom passages, like Jeremiah 24, “I will set My eyes on them for good, I will bring them again to this land; I will build them up, I will plant them. I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.” That’s what this is referring to.

When he talks about dwelling and walking, he’s not talking to nonbelievers and calling them to salvation; he already talks about us as believers and part of Christ and the light and righteousness. He’s speaking to believers and saying that the promise of God is of a future kingdom. [Jeremiah 31:33](#), “This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ says the Lord, ‘I will put My law within their hearts I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Familiar words from Ezekiel 37: “I’ll make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. . . . I will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.” In other words, what he is saying here is all of these kingdom promises mean the purposes of God are on track to be culminated in the reign of Jesus Christ on earth. In other words it will be set right, but not by any efforts that we make in alliance with the world. It will be set right when the King of kings comes.

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

“So having these promises, cleanse yourselves from these unholy alliances.” It’s the promise of the kingdom, the millennial reign of Christ called the regeneration, called the times of refreshing, the time of restitution, the Day of Christ. It’s Revelation 19, where it’s laid out with a thousand-year reign of Christ, as He comes in chapter 19 and establishes in chapter 20 His kingdom, and the new heavens and the new earth ultimately.

In other words, there is a day coming when things will be made right. The promise of the King coming to judge, as in Psalm 2, coming to reign, culminating the New Testament. Isaiah gives us elements of that kingdom. Global, worldwide worship of God as King. Every knee will bow to Yahweh. All nations will see His glory. Perfect justice and fairness, righteousness and truth. Peace between man and man, and man and animals. Economic blessing, abundant rain, long life. No wars; safety, joy. All of that is the kingdom, where God will come and dwell with His people, and walk among them and be their God, and they will be His people. “The Lord will,” [Zechariah 14:9](#) says, “the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one.” “The Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one,” the only ruler.

So I hear a lot about an urban mandate. Have you heard people talk about that? We have an urban mandate to reclaim the cities. You know what the urban mandate is? I’ll give you the urban mandate in the words of Jesus very specifically in Matthew 11.

“Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they didn’t repent. ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it’ll be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.’” And while the contemporary world hasn’t seen the miracles, they have had the revelation of God written. And rejected it.

There is an urban mandate, and that urban mandate is to pronounce judgment on all cities that reject the Lord Jesus Christ, and to warn them as they should they be warned. In Revelation 18, “I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She’s become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.’

“I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.’” For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.’” That’s the urban mandate: Tell the cities what is coming in divine judgment when the whole—currently booming—global economy is crushed into hell.

So because of what God told His people in the past about separation from the world, and because of what He says to us as the church about separation from the world, and because of the future plan of God in which God will do the separating and He will establish the kingdom of righteousness and justice and peace and joy—the command to us there in verse 17, “‘Come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean.’” That is drawn right out of [Isaiah 52:11](#), the chapter prior to great chapter 53.

This is a call to separation, a call to separation. And the day will come when the Lord will welcome us into His presence as sons and daughters who will reign with Him in His eternal kingdom. So we “cleanse ourselves,” chapter 7 verse 1, “from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” What does holiness mean? It means separation, doesn’t it?

So we separate. We separate, “perfecting,” *epiteleō*. That is an eschatological term anticipating the perfection to come in the kingdom, anticipating that all the rights will be established by God, who is perfectly righteous. He’s speaking to the church; it’s in the plural: “Let us cleanse ourselves from all molusmos,” all the unholy alliances. We need no alliances with Satan to advance the kingdom; all that does is corrupt the kingdom.

Our calling is clear: Shine the light into the darkness, don’t mingle with the darkness. [Mark 1:15](#) makes it very simple: Tell people, “Repent and believe in the gospel.” That’s our calling.

Well, we left Peter in sort of an embarrassing way, so let’s see if we can’t recover him. First Peter chapter 1, verse 13. Peter’s learned a lot, and he writes to us, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Look forward to His coming in His kingdom. “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Good, Peter, you got it. Separate. Separate.

Do it because, as you address the Father, you are addressing the one who redeemed you, not “with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ; who was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for your sake, who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so your faith and hope are in God.” Greatest of all prices was paid for you. You are a unique, separate, holy people.

Let’s go to chapter 2 verse 9. Here’s Peter summing it up, borrowing a lot from the Old Testament: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The Church Has No Fellowship with the World

by John MacArthur

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers, abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” What’s the day of visitation? The day that Christ comes face to face with the people who are sitting at His tribunal. You want to so live your life that there will be people influenced and come to faith in the gospel, and they will with you glorify God in the day of His judgment visitation.

So Peter got the message. The message is, “Separate from the world.” When you link up with the world, everything gets completely confused. And some final words from Peter in the end of his last letter: “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard; be on your guard so that you’re not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness.” That’s what we have to be careful to avoid: falling from our own resolve, our own conviction, our own steadfastness as those who live in and proclaim the light. “Grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” Peter signs off by saying, “Just focus on Christ. Just focus on Christ.”

I think there are situations now where people are like Peter. One day they’re saying something comes right from heaven, and the next they’re saying something that comes right from hell. And the chaos and the confusion of all that is ripping and shredding and tearing the evangelical church to bits, because those who should be tied, tethered, locked down by the gospel and the gospel alone have taken up social causes—and they are doing nothing but rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It’s all going down. What’s the point? The only way that we can make a difference in the world is by preaching the gospel—right? So that hearts are transformed.

Father, we thank You for the time this morning to think about these things. So many implications flood my mind, and I know the minds of these faithful men. Thank You for their resolve to preach Christ, and Him crucified; to preach the gospel and to not get sucked up by the things around them, even some of them good things. We know that Jesus never entered into social acts, and Paul never did, and neither did any of the other apostles. They knew the only hope was a changed heart. Didn’t do any good to rearrange sinners in their sinful condition.

Help us, Lord, to focus on preaching the gospel and the gospel alone—and preach Your truth, Your Word, unleashing it one verse at a time, as it were, so that we are faithful to declare the whole counsel of God. That’s our prayer, we pray in our Savior’s name. Amen.