

SEPARATION OR AMONG?

How can I resolve the apparent conflict between the separation passages and the passages that teach we are to be among unbelievers?

How did Jesus live this out?

Hebrews 7:26

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

1. Not separated in daily life or reputation:

Matthew 9:11; Luke 5:30; Luke 7:34; Luke 7:39; Luke 15:2

2. Separation in heart:

John 8:23; John 2:24

3. Separation in practice:

1 Peter 2:22; Luke 23:41; Luke 23:47; John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Hebrews 4:15

Conclusion: For Jesus, holiness did not involve physical separation from sinful people; on the contrary, it seems that he looked for opportunities to socialize with such people. His holiness was a matter of "heart separation." Though his reputation was smeared because of the company he kept, even his enemies were not able to find one genuine sin to condemn him of. He was among sinners and separated from them at the same time.

What about his followers?

Is it possible that his followers could be both separated and among at the same time?

1. Believers are declared holy:

Romans 12:1; Romans 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; Ephes. 1:4; Ephes. 2:21; Ephes. 5:3; Ephes. 5:26-27; Col. 1:2; Col. 1:22; Col. 3:12

2. Passages that show "separate" and "among" together:

Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 2:9-12

3. About "associations":

sunanamignumi; from Greek 4862 (sun) and a compound of Greek 303 (ana) and Greek 3396 (mignumi); *to mix up together, hence to associate with :- associate(3).*

1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thes. 3:14

sugchraomai; from Greek 4862 (sun) and Greek 5530 (chraomai); *to use together with, figuratively to associate with :- have dealings with(1).*

John 4:9

kollao; from **kolla** (*glue*); *to glue, unite :- associate(3), attached(m)(1), cleave(1), cling(1), clings(1), join(1), joined(1), joins(2), piled(m)(1)*

Matthew 19:5

Luke 10:11; Luke 15:15; Acts 5:13; Acts 8:29; Acts 9:26; Acts 10:28; Acts 17:34; Romans 12:9; 1 Cor. 6:16-17; Rev. 18:5

sunapago; from Greek 4862 (sun) and Greek 520 (apago); *to lead away with, figuratively to be carried away with (passive) :- associate(1), carried away(2).*

Romans 12:16; Galatians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:17

Conclusion: Believers also are required to live out their "separation," i.e. holiness, among sinful people. Their lives are to stand in contrast not because of their distance from sinners but because of their closeness to them. The New Testament uses several words translated as "associate." In all uses it seems that there is clear teaching that it is expected, right or good to have association with unbelievers. They are called saints and nowhere is their standing before God changed as a result of hanging around with the wrong kind of people. Believers are encouraged in multiple ways to be among unbelievers.