Probably your response to the title of this article would be “What an audacious and outrageous statement! How in the world would one dare to tell a Christian not to seek the fellowship of another Christian just because he is disorderly? Even if there is a verse in the Bible that appears to say such a thing, is it not unrealistic and unkind to teach that we Christians should not keep company with brethren who are disobedient or noncompliant?”

Dear reader, whatever be your feelings and opinion about the subject of this article, I would have you to take careful notice that God’s Word insists that we maintain no company with Christians who walk in ungodly ways. The Bible does say repeatedly that we should withdraw our fellowship with certain Christians. It gives this instruction not just once or twice, but many times over!

The Bible is loud and clear in teaching us that we should not keep company with unbelievers as well as disobedient, unbiblical or worldly Christians. Consider the following admonitions in the Bible:

“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 tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you” (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7).
“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat” (1 Corinthians 5:11; cf. vv 9, 10).

These are just three of many such admonitions in the Scriptures that tell us to avoid so-called Christians who live in sin of one kind or another. Some other Scripture portions that admonish us to keep away from disorderly churchgoers are 1 Corinthians 5:9, 13; Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Timothy 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:5; Hebrews 12:15-16 and 2 John 10.

As much as it is important that Christians ought to practise the biblical admonition to love and care for one another, it is also imperative that they do not associate closely with brethren who walk disorderly or disobediently. It is against godly wisdom to stay in close fellowship with such individuals.

**How serious is this admonition?**

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” says the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, “that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.” The full title of our Saviour is used in order to stamp this mandate with full divine authority. The apostle’s use of “the name” also indicates that he was acting on behalf of Christ according to His commission (cf. Acts 3:6; 2 Corinthians 2:10).

This command not to keep company with disorderly Christians is spoken with an authority that is higher than that of the kings or governments of the earth, and it is the authority of the Divine Head of the church. Therefore, it is paramount that Christians obey it.

**What does this admonition really mean?**

Striking words like “withdraw” (2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Timothy 6:5), “have no company” (2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 5:11), “mark them . . . and avoid them” (Romans 16:17) and “turn away” (2 Timothy 3:5) are used in this admonition. These words arrest our attention and cause us to consider seriously our casual attitude in having close association with those who walk disorderly. The Apostle Paul puts it even more graphically when he said, “with such an one no not to eat” (1 Corinthians 5:11b). In a similar vein, John the Apostle said, “receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 10).

All of the words we have noted above, when taken either individually or collectively, strongly urge us to avoid close interaction with disorderly Christians. Here we have a language of strategy; a cautious general shrinking from social engagement with such people. Perhaps we might illustrate it by the familiar phrase “fight shy”.

In certain cases of disorderly behaviour, only a social censure or omission is required, not an ecclesiastical excommunication. For instance, in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, after urging believers to “have no company with” the disobedient man, they were advised to “yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”. Nonetheless,
in some situations of serious and prolonged departure from truth and holiness, an ecclesiastical excommunication is mandated (cf. Matthew 18:17).

So it is not a complete ostracizing of a disorderly brother that the Bible is teaching us, but a cautious restraining from close association with such a one. In other words, we would have him remain in the church and also greet him as a brother, while not keeping close company with him until he repents and makes his ways right.

One may ask, “Is it not important that we show love that we might have an opportunity to admonish him?” That is the reason why Paul said that we should not count him as an enemy. We must show a cordial and gentle attitude towards him so that we might have an occasion to correct him. We must not withdraw the civility which is due to every man.

Rudeness is not for Christians. But we must not maintain close fellowship with him who walk in unbiblical ways lest we might appear agreeable to his disorderliness or wrong behaviour. We must withdraw from all unnecessary conversation. We are not to make him our bosom friend.

Who are those to be avoided?
The following list of people with bad behaviour and sinful practices are mentioned in the Bible as disorderly Christians. If anyone who professes to be a Christian is found behaving as such in the following biblical list, he warrants our withdrawal from him.

- Busybody persons (2 Thessalonians 3:11): These are those who meddle with the affairs of others instead of attending to their own duties. They pry into other people’s circumstances and domestic affairs, and tell tales about them by magnifying, minimizing, or misrepresenting. Seeing that some Thessalonians had such a tendency, Paul commanded them, in his earlier epistle, to “do [their] own business” (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

- Lazy and irresponsible persons (2 Thessalonians 3:11). This often leads to other sins. As it was in the case of the Thessalonians, idleness is the mother of busybodies. Even today, we see this to be the case. People, who have too much free time, leaving their own household matters to others, go about as busybodies and often become tattlers.

- “Fornicator” (1 Corinthians 5:11): This is a man who lives in sexual sins. The word ‘fornicator’ is translated from the Greek word pornos from which the English word ‘pornography’ originates. It is descriptive of a man who lives a sensual, immoral life.

- “Covetous” (1 Corinthians 5:11): This is a materialistic person whose life is driven by greed. The love of money and material glory characterises his life’s passions and pursuits. In his philosophy, wealth supersedes truth, mercy and righteousness.

- “Idolater” (1 Corinthians 5:11): This is a man who still engages in other religious feasts and festivals, even though he claims to be a Christian.

- “Railer” (1 Corinthians 5:11): This is a person who speaks reproachfully of others. He abuses others with coarse, rude, harsh and bitter words. He vilifies other
men’s character and hurts their feelings. Railers take pleasure in maligning people, no matter how honest and upright their lives may be.

- “Drunkard” (1 Corinthians 5:11): He is also known as a winebibber. This man takes to intoxicating drinks, which corrupt his thinking and behaviour.

- “Extortioner” (1 Corinthians 5:11): This is a man who swindles others. He robs and cheats others of their possessions. He is also a violent and rapacious person.

- Schismatic persons (Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 John 10): These men “cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned”. They attempt to cause factions within the church. They usurp the authority of godly leaders and oppose the biblical doctrines that they teach. They who attempt to form parties in the churches are commonly actuated by some evil or ambitious design.

- Self-promoting persons (3 John 9-11): These are men who impatiently expel other brethren from the fellowship in order to establish themselves in the leadership. They always promote their own pre-eminence at the expense of others. They seek only their own pleasure and prominence.

Why are we commanded to avoid them?
The biblical admonition to avoid the company of disorderly and disobedient Christians is not, as some might think, an extreme, unreasonable, capricious and unprofitable command. The Bible casts much light on the necessity of this admonition. Consider the following seven biblical reasons for such a command:

Firstly, if we would not withdraw our association with unrepentant ones, this would encourage them to continue in their wrong ways. The Apostle John cautioned, “For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 11). Any friendly gesture other than for the purpose of admonition would only embolden the errant person; and thus we become partakers of his evil deeds. Association with those who commit evil will be like rendering support for
their evil actions. Hence, we must withdraw ourselves from those who walk in sin. Christians should not appear as patrons and friends of the intemperate and the wicked.

Secondly, it is God’s will that a disorderly Christian ought to feel the shame of his evil deeds; and for that purpose we ought to disassociate ourselves from him. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 instructs us, “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.” If we withdraw from a disobedient person, it will make him aware that his actions are unbecoming of a Christian. This is one way of rebuking an errant brother, which God’s Word wants us to practise.

Thirdly, withdrawal from the company of the disobedient one is necessary to protect ourselves from evil influence. As an old saying goes, “There is no plague so catching as sin.” We ourselves are prone to sin because our hearts are naturally corrupt. So we are warned in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that “evil communications corrupt good manners”. The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians who took glory in keeping fellowship with a fornicator, “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 5:6). Those who are unrepentant about their wrong ways will always try to rub their vices on as many people as they can. They would like to see that all behave like themselves. We must guard ourselves from their bad influences by disassociating ourselves from them.

Fourthly, our association with them may drag us not only into their guilt but also into their punishment. Ephesians 5:6 warns us, “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (cf. Proverbs 13:20; Revelation 18:4). Enjoying their pleasantries would be like courting God’s wrath against their sins upon ourselves (cf. Numbers 16:26).

Fifthly, even if no punishment comes upon you, yet the association with disobedient persons will be a burden to the conscientious Christian (cf. Psalm 120:5-7; 2 Peter 2:7-8).

Sixthly, our close association with disobedient persons will be a great hindrance to our service for the Lord. They will discourage, distract and deter us from what the Lord is beckoning us to do.

Seventhly, we should not be beholden to those who walk disobediently, for God’s command is to have company only with the godly. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1). Proverbs 9:6 advises us, “Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.” Delight in the company of the wise and godly, and not in those who are foolish and ungodly. Get your hearts off those things in which the wicked abound. So do not be beholden to them. Let them see your courage and resolution to walk away from that which they embrace.

**Conclusion**

Let us follow the example of the psalmist who said in Psalm 26:4-5, “I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked.”

When a person shows that he is no longer worthy to be recognized as a Christian, leave him to himself and his God. Peradventure, God may bring him to repentance.