



## The Pyramid of Responsibility

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Tiptoeing through the minefields encircling the relationships within the Body of Christ is enormously daunting. It seems that at any moment the dreaded event of stepping in the wrong place will trigger a mine that Satan has laid to disrupt fellowship between believers. As successive issues detonate, the Body of Christ is often divided, and the loss of its vitality prevents brethren from being effective in representing Christ Jesus. Some of these mines are important areas of truth and doctrine that must never be viewed as negotiable. Others are incidental matters that ought not to inflict the damage they do. Some believers conclude that the risk of crossing the field is too high. Consequently, they want little to do with attempting to relate to the entire Body of Christ. They stay where it is safe and allow the rest of the Body of Christ to do the same. As a result of this protectionism and exclusivity, their impact is greatly diminished.

Other believers are so desirous of enjoying relationships with the entire Body of Christ they become indiscriminate. These believers seem to care little about the issues and the damage that compromising their doctrinal beliefs brings. By the time they reach the other side of the minefield, there is little genuine Christianity left. As a result of their inclusiveness, they have little to offer in terms of meaningful fellowship in Christ.



Many who are in the midst of this minefield are grasping for answers that will enable them to determine how they can avoid compromise while enjoying the relationships for which God holds them responsible. These individuals are full of questions such as: With whom may I fellowship as brothers in the Lord? With whom may I cooperate as the salt of the earth? With whom may I reach out with the light of the Gospel? With whom may I worship within the context of the local church? With whom may I enjoy a true family relationship? With whom may I enjoy the intimacy of marriage? Are there any relationships that

include no one except me and the Lord? Each of these questions sharpens the focus in relationships and brings a believer to a more limited level of responsibility. Whereas a person might be able to enjoy personal fellowship with a brother in the Lord, he might not feel able to join his local church. Whereas a believer might be able to join with another believer as "salt" by opposing abortion, he might not be able to serve together with him as "light" in evangelizing the lost with him.

### Holiness and the Biblical Doctrine of Separation

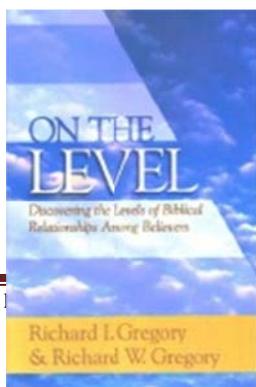
Although all of His attributes are essential, the holiness of God is revealed as His basic attribute ([Isaiah 6:3](#)). This is uniquely important since holiness is used as a name for God ([Proverbs 30:3](#)). In addition, God swears by His holiness ([Psalm 89:35](#)). Honoring God's holiness, by recognizing

that we are to be separated unto God, is the most basic, practical doctrine for the believer to embrace. Throughout this book, the term separation is therefore used in its biblical sense. [Ezekiel 44:23](#), in speaking of the priest's role, says: Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. (See also [Leviticus 10:10](#); [Ezekiel 22:26](#)). The biblical doctrine of separation requires that believers make a distinction between the sacred and profane, the pure and impure, the obedient and disobedient and ultimately between good and evil.

Certainly, holiness must be viewed as indispensable in the life of every believer ([Hebrews 12:14](#)). God commands that His followers be holy: And 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' ([1 Peter 1:15-16](#)). Thus, the doctrine of biblical separation must be seen as the practical application of the truth that God is absolutely holy. However, the appropriate focus of believers is to strive to be like the One who is holy - not merely different from those believed to be unholy. Simply separating from the ungodly or disobedient does not in itself make one a biblical separatist. If the character of God and heart of God are not being reflected in one's attitudes, the biblical doctrine and purpose of separation is being defiled, not fulfilled.

If God separates Himself from evil, can the believer be holy like the Holy One who called you without separating himself from evil? In this regard, since God himself is a "separatist," those whom God places "upon this earth to represent Him would be required to be holy (separated) as well. They would be expected to mirror His character." (Ernest Pickering, *Biblical Separation*, Regular Baptist Press, 1979, p. 173) However, too often in attempting to emulate the character of God by separating from evil, believers have dishonored the name of God by misrepresenting Him in spirit. With harshness and bitterness they have castigated, vilified, and denigrated people with whom they have disagreed - all in the name of the holy God. What is missing is the heart of the holy God, whom they strive to emulate, for He gave His own Son to reconcile those who are at enmity with Him. His heart is to redeem, restore, reconcile, and recover a relationship with those who are estranged from Him.

While emulating God's holiness by striving to separate from evil, we cannot dismiss our duty to emulate His desire to see those who are disobedient come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will ([2 Timothy 2:26](#)). To affirm oneself by catching another in error does not represent God's heart since rejoicing in unrighteousness discredits one's claim of genuine love ([1 Corinthians 13:6a](#)). At the same time, those who would repudiate the doctrine of separation in favor of integration (as is true of the New-Evangelicals as noted by Harold Lindell, *The Battle for the Bible*, Zondervan, 1976, p. 11) must also be identified as incongruent with the heart of God.



#### Purpose of This Book

This book is designed to provide believers with the understanding that there are varying levels of relationships within the Body of Christ, each with differing responsibilities. Although somewhat inclusive on the broadest level (our brotherhood in Christ), relationships become

increasingly limited as one moves toward the individual's standing before the Lord (priesthood of the believer). Thus, the most limited level of relationship is the priesthood of the believer, a level so exclusive that no one except the individual believer and the Lord are able to enjoy it. Confusing the limitations of one level with those of another is where the majority of detonations occur in the minefield of biblically mandated relationships between believers. Seeking to apply the freedoms intended for a "lower" level to a level designed to be more limited produces inclusivism and compromise. Likewise, seeking to impose the restrictions intended for an "upper" level to a level designed to be broader brings exclusivism and unwarranted schism. Therefore the Pyramid of Responsibility of biblically mandated relationships must be understood and applied as believers seek to emulate our holy and loving God.

### The Relationship Between Two Reformers

During the Sixteenth Century, Protestants and Roman Catholics debated crucial issues such as the ground of salvation, the nature of justification, the means of grace, imputed righteousness, and the famous concepts of sola fide and sola scriptura. Even in the midst of these great debates, genuine believers were dividing over issues that legitimately affected which level of relationship they could enjoy but should not have resulted in schism.

One such argument focused on the nature of the elements used in Communion. The Lutheran and the Reformed leaders met at Marburg, Germany in 1529 to conduct the first conference designed to unite Protestants around a common doctrinal statement. Luther and Zwingli represented the two groups respectively and were able to come to agreement on fourteen of the fifteen doctrinal points that the conference addressed. However, Luther's disposition and dogmatism promoted a sharp division over the nature of the elements in Communion. The inability to agree to disagree in love would continue to make unity impossible. Luther continued to attack those who believed that the elements of Communion were only symbols of the body and blood of Christ. Because of the intensity of this disagreement, Luther sought no level of relationship with Zwingli whatsoever. Historian Philip Schaff notes that shortly before Luther's death he continued to overwhelm Zwingli and his followers "with terms of opprobrium, and coined new ones, which cannot be translated into English. He called them heretics, hypocrites, liars, blasphemers, soul-murders, sinners unto death, bedeviled all over. He ceased to pray for them and left them to their fate." (History of the Christian Church, 2nd Edition, Eerdmans, 1980, 7:656)

Zwingli, on the other hand, had a much more conciliatory attitude toward Luther and begged him to come to some expression of unity. However, Luther resisted saying, "if they would have unity, let them agree with me." It is as though Luther decided that the restrictions which necessarily characterize the highest level of the priesthood of the believer had to be applied to every level of relationship within the Body - even the lowest level of fellowship between brothers. Zwingli seemed to have a better spirit. He was characterized by Rupert Meldenius' famous Seventeenth Century motto: "in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." (Ibid. page 650)

This is a prime example of the lack of understanding of the importance of biblically responsible relationships. Luther and Zwingli were both committed to the same essential doctrines of Protestantism as was demonstrated by the Marburg Colloquy's fourteen points of agreement. Yet Luther refused to call Zwingli a brother and even doubted his salvation. Because of a disagreement on a doctrine not essential to redemption, Luther maligned Zwingli as a heretic. Luther displayed no awareness of the various levels of relationships that exist within the Body of Christ.

Although this point of difference may have limited Luther's ability to conscientiously join with Zwingli for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, it ought not to have caused him to negate the validity of Zwingli's salvation. How tragic! Yet this has been repeated over and over through the years because, like Luther, many believers have failed to recognize that relationships within the Body of Christ do not demand total agreement on all matters of doctrine and practice. There exist, within the scope of Christian relationships, various levels of intimacy and intensity that produce corresponding responsibilities. Just as Christ had levels of relationships within the twelve, setting apart Peter, James and John as his inner circle, so believers must recognize that God does not intend that every relationship within the Body be equally intimate and intense. It is necessary for each believer to identify the levels of relationships and the responsibilities each demand.

Although each believer is responsible to every other believer to recognize their value as brothers in Christ, many mistakes have been made because the various levels of relationship within the Body are ignored. When this is the case, there is inevitable confusion concerning the responsibilities believers have toward one another. It is important to recognize that as relationships within the body of Christ become more focused in intensity, biblical responsibilities correspondingly increase. Careful study of the Word of God will reveal the progression of responsibilities God expects believers to fulfill. These responsibilities begin with one's relationship to all believers, and culminate with the enjoyment of the Lord alone through the priesthood of the believer.

Ours is an attempt to identify the various levels of relationships within the Body of Christ based upon the biblical responsibilities that each level demands of believers. Understanding these levels and the responsibilities each invokes will help maintain proper Christian attitudes in applying the principles of biblical separation. Believers cannot escape the biblical mandate to distinguish between the holy and the unholy and the sacred and the profane. The holiness of God demands this. Having the spiritual disposition to make that distinction is vital to the fulfillment of God's expectation that we be a people separated unto His name, while at the same time loving one another.

*This article is adapted from the book [On The Level: Discovering the Levels of Biblical Relationships Among Believers](#) by Richard I. and Richard W. Gregory (IFCA Press, 2005). Call 616-531-1840 to order your copy!*