

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "'The World' In John 3" (Colossians 3:16-17, John 3:1-21, 1 John 2:15-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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As we continue our study of the Biblical doctrine of separation, let me call your attention once again to two related passages of Scripture that we are considering at the present time. The first is our theme passage for this series of messages, which is found in Colossians chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. If you are able to do so, I hope that you will turn with me to Colossians chapter 3 and follow along as I read verses 16 and 17, and also as we consider other portions of God's inspired, infallible, inerrant Word together today. So we begin at Colossians chapter 3, verse 16:

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

And then let me also remind you of the second passage on which we have been focusing our attention in these recent messages. This passage is found in the first epistle of John, near the end of the New Testament, in chapter 2 beginning at verse 15. First John chapter 2, beginning at verse 15:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of

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the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

This passage presents us with a key requirement if we are to be truly separated from this present evil world, and separated unto God. That key requirement is a change in our attitude toward this present world. We must no longer love the world. Now this commandment of God presents us with a crucial question: How can it be that we as Christians are told not to love the world in First John chapter 2, when our Lord Jesus Christ Himself declares in the Gospel of John chapter 3 that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" for the salvation of the world?

First of all, we saw that Scripture declares to us clearly that this cannot be a contradiction within the Word of God. The God of the Bible is not like the pagan gods that we find throughout history, gods who have been made by the heart and hands of sinful man after his own fallen image. The God of the Bible is not a God of paradox.

Humbly Approaching God's Word

And so we must continue to ask the question: How can this be? How can Christians be commanded not to love the world when Scripture makes it clear that God Himself so loved the world? At the end of our last message, I reminded you that we need to ask questions of the Word of God. This is not so that we can place ourselves in authority over the Word of God, but so that we can, by God's

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grace, more fully understand His Word. There is nothing sinful about humbly asking legitimate questions about the Scriptures.

But we need to go about the task of finding the answers to our questions in a proper way. Our thinking needs to be controlled by the principles of Scripture, and illuminated by God the Holy Spirit, the One who is the Author of every particle, every word, of Scripture.

One of the ways in which we must approach a question like this is to understand the meaning of the words that are used in Scripture in the original languages. In particular, we need to understand the meaning of the word "world" as it is used by the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John chapter 3, when He says that "God so loved the world." We also need understand the meaning in context of the word "world" when the Apostle John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says to Christians in the epistle of First John chapter 2, "Do not love the world."

The Word *Kosmos*

And so that is the point to which we have come in our study. The Greek word that is translated "world" in both John 3 and in First John 2 is the word *kosmos*. This is a word that can have several different meanings according to its context. The same thing is also true of the word "world" in the English language.

We may speak, in the English language, on the one hand of "the world" meaning the physical earth. We may also speak of "the world of science" or "the

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world of education" – and in those cases, we are referring to the sphere of knowledge and practice of science or education. We use the same word in both cases, but the meanings are very different depending on the context. It would be absurd to think that when we speak of "the world of education" that we are speaking of the physical earth.

The same is true in the Greek language of the New Testament. The Greek word *kosmos* can speak of the physical world, the created order, the universe. The word *kosmos* in a different context can mean "an ordered system of things." It can also refer to a specific segment of world affairs. The word *kosmos* can also refer to mankind. The word *kosmos* is also used many times in Scripture to make a distinction between those members of the human race who are in Christ, and those who are spoken of as "the world" – the mass of humanity that is alienated from God and hostile to Christ and His Word. And *kosmos* has a number of other meanings that time does not permit us describe.

Jesus' Declarations to Nicodemus

But our question of the present time is this: What did the Lord Jesus mean when He used this word in John chapter 3? He uses the word not once, but five times. If you are able to do so as you are listening, please turn with me in your own copy of God's Word to the Gospel of John chapter 3, beginning at verse one. John chapter 3, beginning at verse one. Here the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John gives us the account of the crucial conversation between our Lord Jesus and

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the Pharisee named Nicodemus. John chapter 3, beginning at verse one:

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again [literally, born from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly I say to you, We speak what

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We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

"No one has ascended to Heaven but He who came down from Heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in Heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world [here we have the first occurrence of the Greek word *kosmos* in this passage – for God so loved the world] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world [there is the word *kosmos* for the second time] to condemn the world [there is the word for the third time], but that the world [the word *kosmos* again] through Him might be saved.

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world [there we have the word *kosmos* for the fifth and final time in this passage – light has come into the world], and men loved darkness

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rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

What Did Jesus Truly Say?

Now dear friends, the meaning of the word "world" in John chapter 3 has long been debated among theologians. Time does not permit me to give you even a concise list of all of the answers that men have given. But so often, the focus of the argument is John 3:16 – Jesus' statement that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." And the debate often is limited to the question, "Who does God love?" or "For whom did Christ die?"

But I want to submit to you that these questions are not in view here, and this is why: If we look at the larger context of John chapter 3, if we look at all five of the times that Jesus uses the word that is given to us in the Greek as *kosmos*, and if we look at Jesus' statement to Nicodemus as a whole, we find that this clearly is not the focus of Jesus' statement. The picture that we are given of the world and of God's love is far larger, far more comprehensive. The picture that Jesus gives us in John chapter 3 is truly *cosmic*. And the rest of Scripture confirms to us that this is the case.

Jesus gives us a very clear indication of this fact in several things that He says to Nicodemus in John chapter 3. It is noteworthy first of all that Nicodemus

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approached Jesus as "Rabbi" – a mere human teacher. At this point Nicodemus did not understand that the Man he was addressing was God Himself who had come to the earth in human form. He said, "No one can do these signs that You do unless God is *with* him." Nicodemus believed that there was a *close association* between Jesus and God, that God *endorsed and empowered* what Jesus was doing, but Nicodemus was not saying that Jesus was God. He had not yet come to believe this.

But notice how Jesus answered Nicodemus. He immediately sought to correct Nicodemus' misapprehensions. Jesus said, verse three, that the vital thing, is "the kingdom of God" – God's eternal kingdom. The vital thing is to see and to understand the nature of that kingdom, and to be born into that kingdom, by being born again. Jesus would say on other occasions that His kingdom is "not of this [present] world." For this reason Jesus said that it is one thing to be born of the flesh – to be born into this present world – and another thing entirely to be born of the Spirit – to be reborn for life in the world to come.

Notice further that Jesus said to Nicodemus, John chapter 3 verse 12, that He was speaking to him not of earthly things, but of heavenly things. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus used these two terms interchangeably in the Gospels. Jesus said, verse 13, that He had come down from Heaven. And it is with these distinctions in mind that Jesus speaks of God so *loving* the world in verse 16, and of God's *saving* the world in verse 17, and of Himself, Jesus as "the light [that] has come *into* the world" in verse 19.

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And so, dear friends, let me submit to you that the true meaning of the word "world" in John chapter 3 – the world that God loved, the world that God came to save – encompasses far more than mankind or any segment of mankind. God's concern is for His *entire created order* as well as for man made in His image as the pinnacle of that order.

When our first parents yielded to the temptation of Satan and fell into sin, as it is recorded for us in Genesis chapter 3, the entire created order was plunged into the curse of sin. And God's promise, and God's eternal plan, is not only to redeem a people for Himself, but to redeem the universe itself from the curse and condemnation of sin as their eternal dwelling place. The two things are intimately connected.

Many passages of Scripture declare this to us. Because of the limits of time, let me give you just one very significant example. Turn with me, if you are able, to Romans chapter 8, beginning at verse 19. Romans chapter 8, beginning at verse 19. Notice what the Apostle Paul tells us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

For the earnest expectation of the creation [and this is a Greek word that signifies the entire created order, the entire universe] eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because [notice] the creation itself also will be delivered from the

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bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

A Truly *Cosmic* Salvation

And so, dear friends, let me submit to you on the authority of the Word of God, let me submit to you based not on a very narrow view of a single verse of Scripture, but on the basis of the revelation that God has given us of His eternal plan, that when Jesus declares – John 3:16, that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" – when Jesus declares this, He is speaking, as the Apostle Paul speaks in Romans, of the redemption not only of a people for the kingdom of God but also of the created order as the dwelling place of the kingdom of God for all eternity.

And it is on this basis that we have the great culmination of the plan of God that is given to us in the closing chapters of the book of Revelation. Turn with me, if you are able, to Revelation chapter 21. Revelation chapter 21, beginning at verse one. The Apostle John is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

Now I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I

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heard a loud voice from Heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He [Jesus] who sat on the throne said, "Behold I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Biblical Separation: A *Cosmic Imperative*

Now dear friends, we have much more to say about this, because the Word of God has much more to say about this. And we are going to see that all of this relates very closely and vitally to the Biblical doctrine of separation. What we have before us is the reason for the imperative of Biblical separation; the reason why it is essential to the plan of God that each and every one of His believing remnant, the citizens of the world to come, should be conformed more and more to the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ here and now.

And with this in mind, let me close today by calling your attention back to the passage that we considered a few minutes ago in Romans chapter 8. In particular, Romans chapter 8 beginning at verse 22. The Apostle Paul under Divine inspiration writes this:

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For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered

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Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

This is the great hope of the believer, and it is the great imperative – truly, the *cosmic* imperative – for Biblical separation.

About the Broadcast

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**May the Lord richly bless your personal study
of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**

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