

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "The Standard of Separation" (Colossians 3:16-17, 1 Peter 1:13-19)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/23/2014

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Today we are continuing our study of the Biblical doctrine that instructs Christians individually, and the church as a body, to be separate from the world and separated unto God. As we begin, let me call your attention once again to the passage in Colossians chapter 3 in which we find what I believe we may call the key to the practical implementation of this doctrine, in the life of the Christian and in the life of the church.

If you are able to do so as you are listening, I invite you to turn with me in your own copy of the Word of God to Colossians chapter 3 at verse 16. Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 16, we read these words:

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.

Let me remind you of the points that we've considered thus far in this series.

The Church's Job Is Not to Re-Engineer the World

First of all, we have seen that the doctrine of separation is directly and vitally related to the mission of the church as Christ has given it in the Great Commission. It is not primarily the job of the church to improve conditions in

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this present world – not morally, not economically, not socially, not in any other way.

Often in the history of the world we find that as individuals have been transformed by the Gospel, through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, and as they have lived lives that are pleasing to God, that this has had a tremendous effect on the world around them.

But this is a secondary effect. In the sovereign plan of God it may or may not happen in a particular time or place, and it may or may not happen in the way that we would think or even desire. The job of the church is not the social engineering or any other kind of reengineering or renovation of this present world. That may happen as a secondary effect and it often does, but it is not the mission of the church.

The church fails if it makes these things its primary mission instead of the Gospel. These things are not the Gospel. The Gospel is above all a message of the only way of salvation from this present evil world in order to live life in the world to come forever, and the only way to receive that deliverance is by the grace of God through the shed blood of Christ.

This world is passing away. This present earth is going to be destroyed by fire, and purged and renovated and made new. It is the job of the church to proclaim the Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ so that a people chosen by God may be redeemed from the curse of this present evil world to live life in the

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world to come, in which sin will have no presence and no power. And so it is vital for individual Christians and for the church as a body to live in spiritual separation from this present evil world that is passing away.

A Relevant Doctrine

Secondly, we have taken up the question, Why deal with the doctrine of separation in the 21st century church? Is this not, as many would have us believe today, an outmoded or outdated or irrelevant doctrine? And we have seen that the answer of the Word of God to those questions is a resounding "No!" Perhaps never before in the history of the people of God, both Old and New Testaments, has this doctrine been more relevant and more vital than it is for the church today in its present condition, and the world today in its present condition.

Scripture Defines Separation

And thirdly, we have seen that Scripture defines separation for us. We have seen that the verb that is translated "be separate" in Second Corinthians chapter 6 verse 17 means to observe the boundaries established by God that mark Christians off from the unbelieving cultures. The word also has the sense of excluding from our thinking and our living and our worship those things that are disreputable in the sight of God. And the word that is translated "be separate" also has to do with our being set apart in the plan of God for His glorious purpose, which is to redeem a people for Himself out of all the debased cultures of this present evil world to live in the new world to come.

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Furthermore we have seen that Christianity, the life apart from sin that is set before us as the standard in the Word of God, is not a function of any of the cultures of this present world. Separated living, separated thinking, is the culture of the world to come.

The Twofold Key to Separated Thinking and Living

And fourthly, we have seen what I submit to you is the key to separated living and thinking, in the passage that I read a few moments ago. And just as many physical keys are cut on two sides, there are two sides or two aspects to the key to separated living and thinking.

The first is for the Word of God to be fully at home within us, to have unrestricted liberty to change the way we live and to change the way we think, to conform us more and more to the image of Christ. That is the force of the words that we find in Colossians 3:16, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom."

The second aspect of this key is found in the last words of the passage, in verse 17. Everything that we do, everything that we say, and therefore everything that we think, must be worthy of having the mark of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ upon it. It must be doing and saying and thinking that glorifies God, doing and saying and thinking as a sacrifice of thankfulness to God the Father for all that He has done for us through Christ. That is the force of the

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words of verse 17, "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."

On to Further Questions

Now, with all of these things in mind, we come to additional questions about the doctrine of separation. Some of these we have considered in a general way, but we need to consider them more specifically and more deeply.

The next question on which we need to focus our attention is this: "What is the reason for separation, according to Scripture?" And this leads us to the further consideration of additional questions. Establishing the Biblical reason for separation demands that we look at these additional questions: What is the standard of separation? What is the imperative of separation? What is the foundation of separation? And, What is the position of separation?

These questions are going to move us in our study from what we might call the realm of pure doctrine into the realm of applied doctrine. The Word of God is nothing if not practical. The Word of God is an exceedingly practical book. The Bible is not a book of mere theory. Our Lord Jesus proclaims that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And His Word plainly shows us that He is the way to eternal life, that eternal life commences here and now, in this present world, and that it is a life to be lived according to truth, the truth of Scripture.

As I've said before, this is one of the reasons why we are taking up the

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doctrine of separation as a focus of our study because it will prepare us to see the a very practical teaching that we find in the rest of the book of Colossians in a proper light. The practical teaching that we find in Colossians chapters 3 and 4 is rooted and grounded in a standard of separation, an imperative of separation, the foundation of separation, and a position of separation, that we must understand.

It is not at all an exaggeration to say that in Colossians chapters 3 and 4 we find a handbook for separated living. Dear friends, if the true church of Christ in America and in all other parts of the world were to truly get hold of this, if the church of redeemed people were to truly live the kind of separated life that is set before us in Colossians chapters 3 and 4, it would have an effect on this world, it would be a witness to this world, such as has not been seen since the earliest days of the church.

And in that connection, let me briefly say this as well: Biblical separation is not legalism. Biblical separation is not a burden placed upon the Christian. It is a tremendous opportunity for the individual Christian, for the Christian family, and for the Christian church. That is why this present study is so vital.

The Reason for Separation

And so let us begin to take up these next questions. First of all, What is the reason for separation? The reason for separation is that our God is a holy God. And dear friend, the marvelous fact of the New Covenant is that the holy God of

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the universe, God the Holy Spirit, is living within you. First Corinthians chapter 6, verse 19:

... Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

The great reason for separation is the fact that the holy God of the universe has taken up residence within you. You are not your own. You do not belong to yourself. God has purchased you at the price of the blood of His only begotten Son. "Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Your body belongs to God. The physical part of you, the part that can be seen and felt and touched, belongs to God. But notice that your spirit also belongs to God – the unseen part of you, your inner being that feels and thinks and decides, and acts upon those decisions. Your mind, your will. This belongs to God as well. And God has the right to exercise full authority over that which He owns.

And furthermore it is the nature of God that He is completely holy. He is totally "other." He is morally perfect. Compromise of any kind is entirely contrary to God's nature. In Amos chapter 3 verse 3, God said this as He spoke against the nation of Israel because of their sin – He said, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?"

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God wasn't speaking here merely of two human beings walking in agreement with each other. He was saying to Israel, it is not possible for you to walk together with Me unless we are agreed. And that agreement requires that you change, that you conform to My way. I, God, will not compromise with sin; you must not compromise with sin.

The Standard of Separation

And so this brings us to our second question: What is the standard of separation? The standard is simply this, and God states it repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments: "Be holy, because I am holy." Let me briefly take you to Scriptures which speak of this.

Leviticus 11:44-45 – [God commanded Israel not to defile themselves in any way because] "I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy... For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."

When God through Moses restated His moral law to the children of Israel in Leviticus chapter 19, He said this, beginning at verse two: "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'"

And in the next chapter, in Leviticus 20, as God warned the children of Israel

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against various forms of spiritual prostitution, He said that they must deal with such things in an absolutely uncompromising way. Under the Old Covenant, the individual who prostituted himself with the gods of the surrounding nations, or turned to mediums and spiritualists and similar kinds of things that we would call "New Age" practices today – which aren't new at all – God said that such a person under the law of the nation of Israel was to be put to death, so that such things would not spread in Israel.

And in Leviticus chapter 20, verse seven, God said to the people, There is one way that you can avoid such judgment: "Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God."

We do not have a New Testament command to put anyone to death for these things. But as we saw in our last message, the individual Christian has repeated New Testament admonitions to put sin to death within himself. That is the New Testament pattern of separation. You are now the temple of the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore you must put sin to death within yourself, just as Israel was to put sin to death in the land in which God dwelled under the Old Covenant.

And lest we should ever think that the doctrine of separation is somehow an Old Testament teaching and not also a New Testament truth, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Peter tells us this in First Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 13:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind...

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And let me stop right here and explain what the Word of God is saying to us. This is a picture that is based on the type of garments that people wore in New Testament times. It was the practice of those times to wear one or more layers of robes depending on the weather. The phrase "gird up the loins" had to do with gathering up your robes so that you could move in a hurry, so that you could exert yourself, so that you could move freely and in an unimpeded manner, and not stumble or fall.

Peter is telling us that we need to have our minds in that kind of condition. Be ready for action at the command of God. And so, continuing in First Peter 1:13:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you with the revelation of Jesus Christ [in other words when Jesus comes again]; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but [notice] as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear [reverential fear of God]; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with

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the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Here we have the echo of the words that we found in First Corinthians 6:19, that we are not our own, that we have been bought at a price, the precious blood of Christ, and therefore the standard of separation is in fact God Himself – "He who called you" as Peter refers to God here. "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct..."

The standard of separation, the standard of holiness, is God Himself. And the standard is all-encompassing – "in all manner of conduct" – in every aspect of your behavior, in every phase and facet of your way of life, both the seen and the unseen.

The Culture of Our Holy God

Dear friends, I've said this before, but I believe I need to emphasize it again: Christianity is not a function of the cultures of this present evil world. It is the culture of the world to come. It is the culture of the holy God of the universe.

So many people who are not Christians, and even many who are Christians, have a habit of saying words to this effect: "My religion is the Sermon on the Mount." And often when they say this, they are thinking only in terms of the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 – "Blessed are the poor in spirit" – "Blessed are those who mourn" – "Blessed are the meek" – and so on.

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And certainly there is nothing wrong with these things, and there is everything right about these things, as long as we do not look upon these things as a standard of self-righteousness, as long as we don't look at these things as something that will earn us salvation.

But we must also remember that the Sermon on the Mount that begins with the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5:1 also continues all the way through the end of Matthew chapter 7. And Jesus takes up many other things. One of the things that He takes up is the fact that obedience to God is not a mere matter of the external.

He says beginning at Matthew 5:21 that if an individual is angry with his brother in his heart, that he is just as guilty of murder as if he had performed the physical act of murder. Beginning in verse 27, Jesus says that the person who looks at a woman to lust after her is just as guilty of breaking the moral law of God as the person who actually commits the physical act of adultery.

And by the same token, God tells us repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments, "Be holy, for I am holy" – "in all manner of conduct" – "in your body [the external which can be seen] and in your spirit [your unseen inner self]" – because all of you belongs to God.

Time does not permit us to continue into additional questions today, but the Lord willing in our next message we will continue to pursue these points from the Word of God. We are going to see that there are promises of God to those who live a separated life. We are going to consider carefully what the foundation

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of separated living is, and we are going to consider carefully the position of the one who is truly separated unto God and separated from the world, and what the Word of God says about that glorious position.

May the Lord burn these truths ever more deeply into the hearts and minds of the all those indwelled by His Spirit. Amen.

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