

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "God's Word in the Trash Pile" (Colossians 3:16-17, 2 Kings 22-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/9/2014

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As we begin today, let me call your attention to two particular verses in the section of the book of Colossians that we are presently considering. Those verses are found in Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 16. God the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul gives this imperative, this commandment, to the church of Jesus Christ:

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.

Today I want to emphasize particularly the first words of this passage: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom."

In our last message, we began what will be, the Lord willing, a series of messages on the Biblical doctrine of separation. We are considering this vital topic as an introduction to our study of the remaining portions of the book of Colossians, in chapters 3 and 4. These two chapters deal with specific teachings concerning the life that a Christian is to live in this present world.

Now the word "separation" or the word "separate" does not appear in these two chapters. But as God the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul instructs individual Christians and instructs the church on how we are to live in this present evil world, the underlying principle of Biblical separation is clearly

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before us. As the Apostle Paul deals with the issues of Christian character, the Christian home, the Christian in the workplace, the Christian among his neighbors, and the Christian within the visible church, it is clear that separation unto God and separation from the world form the foundation of the commands that God the Holy Spirit gives to the church in these two chapters.

For example, in chapter 3, verses six and seven, Paul speaks of the fact that the Colossian believers once walked in the ways of the world, the ways of the "sons of disobedience." But he declares that it is their responsibility to "put to death" those things having to do with their former life in the world. In chapter 3, verse 23, he speaks of doing all that we do "as to the Lord and not to men." And in chapter 4, verse five, he speaks of walking "in wisdom toward those who are outside" – in other words, toward those who are outside of Christ, those who are still in the unbelieving world and under the sway of the Evil One.

### **Why Study This Doctrine?**

In our last message, I said that we are going to answer a number of questions from Scripture concerning the doctrine of separation. The very first of those questions is this: "Why should we deal with this subject at all in the 21st century church?" That question is asked, even by many within the visible church today. And behind that question is often the implication that we should not be addressing this Biblical truth in the 21st century, and that this is an inconvenient or irrelevant teaching for the church in the present day.

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But dear friends, nothing could be further from the truth, and I want to demonstrate that fact to you today.

A keen and constant awareness of the imperative of separation from the world and separation unto God must always be on the minds of all true believers in Christ. That is why we must obey God's command that we find in Colossians chapter 3, verse 16: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom..."

In the original language, this means that we as believers in Christ should submit ourselves to the authority of the Word of God, in such a way that the Word of God is literally "at home" within us. The Word of God must have unrestricted liberty within our lives and our thinking.

Scripture tells us in many places that you, the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, are the temple of the living God in this present world. There must be no place in God's temples in which His Word is not welcome – no place within the life and thinking of the Christian, no place within the life and thinking of the church as a body of Christians – no place, anywhere, anytime.

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you" – let it be at home in you, God commands – "richly in all wisdom." In other words, there must be an abundance of the presence of the Word of God in our living and our thinking. We must therefore be ever increasing, ever growing, in our knowledge of the Word of God.

This is why it is vital for us to have the doctrine of separation always in our

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minds, always ingrained in our thinking and living. Separation from the world and separation unto God should be the normal way of thinking for every believer in Christ. Christians today, and the church today, are not somehow exempt from the doctrine of separation. Some will try to say that we do not need to speak of this doctrine today, and indeed some will say that we *must not* speak of this doctrine today – because, they say, conditions in the world have changed from previous decades and centuries.

But dear friends, that is a false assumption. The heart of man is not changed. The condition of man has not changed. The heart of man is just as "deceitful and desperately wicked" as it has always been. If anything, man today is worse than he has ever been. Man is not on an upward progression. Man apart from God and apart from Christ is on a downward progression toward Hell.

### **Separation and the History of God's People**

Dear friends, I submit to you that it is one of the great tragedies of the church in our time that the doctrine of separation is not being taught and emphasized. Within the church today we find attitudes toward the doctrine of separation ranging from careless indifference all the way to active antagonism.

We find widespread misunderstanding of the Biblical doctrine of separation. We find many people equating the doctrine of separation with legalism. But true, Biblical, separation is not legalism. True holiness in the eyes of God is not legalism. True holiness in the eyes of God is not an effort to earn merit with God

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by our own strength and our own resources. True holiness comes from subjection to the Word of God and to the indwelling Spirit of God.

As we look at the history of the church, we find that the times of spiritual strength in the church, the times of revival in the church, have been times of separation from the world, and separation unto God. Of course, one of the great examples of this is the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. But we also find many other periods of revival, places of revival, instances of revival throughout the history of the church, some very local, but others quite widespread, where the church was particularly strong and particularly blessed and especially and powerfully used of God because the people of God separated themselves unto Him, and separated themselves from the world.

The history of spiritual strength in the church of Jesus Christ is the history of separation. The history of spiritual failure among God's people is a history of compromise with the world. This is why it is so vital for us to understand the Biblical doctrine of separation in the church today, to lay hold of this vital doctrine once again, and to take our stand, separated from the world, and separated unto God.

The Word of God itself decisively and repeatedly answers the question, the question in all periods of the history of God's people, which says, "Why should our generation be concerned about separation from the world?" And this is always the answer that we find in the Word of God: Separation from the world

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and separation unto God is a matter of spiritual life and spiritual death. It is a matter of spiritual strength versus spiritual weakness.

### **God's Word in the Trash Pile**

Today I want to call your attention to one particular very remarkable demonstration of these facts in the Word of God. Please turn with me in your own Bible if you are able, to the book of Second Kings, chapter 22. I want to point out particular verses in chapter 22 and 23 that bear upon the Biblical imperative for separation on the part of the people of God.

We read in the Book of Second Kings in chapter 22 that a man named Josiah became king of Judah. He became king after a long period of apostasy in the land – nearly 60 years in which his father and his grandfather had done evil in the sight of the Lord, and had followed after the abominations of the paganism of the surrounding nations. But Josiah was different. We read in Second Kings chapter 22, verse two, that

he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of his [fore]father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

When the young King Josiah was 26 years old, he decreed that the temple, the house of God in the land of Judah, should be repaired. The temple had fallen into terrible condition. It had fallen not only into a state of terrible physical disrepair,

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but the temple of God and the priesthood of God had also fallen into a horrible spiritual state.

The Word of God had been so neglected in the temple of God that no one even knew where the Book was. God's Word was buried in the rubbish within His own temple. And we read in Second Kings chapter 22 verse eight that Hilkiah the high priest, a man who was supposed to be responsible for not only preserving the Word of God but also proclaiming the Word of God, found the Book of the law of God among the rubble and the rubbish.

### **Josiah: Zealous for God's Word**

We read later in that same chapter, in verse 10, that one of the scribes took the Book of the Word of God to King Josiah and read it before him. And in verse 11 we read that when the king heard the words of the Book, he tore his clothes. Now tearing one's clothes was a sign of great grief and great distress among the Jews. It was a sign that someone was as disturbed and troubled and distressed about something as he could possibly be. Disturbed and troubled and distressed in a violent way. The king was that disturbed, that distressed because of the terrible neglect of the Word of God in Israel.

Josiah's reaction to the rediscovered imperatives of the Word of God was a reaction of indignation, a reaction based on fear of the consequences of the long neglect of God's Word. And Josiah's reaction demonstrated a vehement desire, a zealous desire, to personally submit to the full authority of the Word of God, and

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to lead the nation in repentance and turning away from idols to serve the one true and living God.

And so we read at the beginning of Second Kings chapter 23 that King Josiah gathered

all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. The king went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem – the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he [the king] read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord.

Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this Book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant.

And then notice what we read in Second Kings chapter 23, at verse four. Here the king puts into action his zeal for the Biblical doctrine of separation. Chapter 23, verse four:

And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the

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Lord all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel.

Let me explain what we are reading here. The people of Judah had brought into the temple of the one true and living God various articles, various devices, so that they could pursue the pagan worship of other gods, false gods. Baal was a false God that was worshiped by many of the surrounding nations. The worship of Baal was actually associated directly with the worship of Satan himself in many of the cultures of that time and also of later periods. Asherah was a female goddess that was worshiped in Egypt and in Persia and later in the Roman Empire under various names.

The worship of these gods involved sexual perversion. Notice Second Kings chapter 23, verse five:

Then he [King Josiah] removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah [in other words his father and grandfather] had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the Lord, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground it to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people.

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Then he tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image [in other words, decorations to be placed upon the pagan image].

When this passage speaks of "the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the Lord" it is speaking of the fact that there was actual ritual sodomite prostitution taking place, within the temple of the one true and living God, as part of the worship of the false gods of the surrounding cultures that had been brought into the holy place of the temple of God.

We read further on in Second Kings chapter 23 that the people of Judah had been sacrificing their sons and daughters to the pagan god called Molech. That is how far Judah had fallen spiritually, because of the neglect of the Word of God. The history of many generations in Israel and Judah is a history of spiritual compromise, spiritual adultery, a history of disobedience of God's command to be separate – as He said to them many times, to "be holy, because I am holy."

### **Today's Un-Separated Church**

Now dear friends, some of you may be asking why I am calling this particular chapter in the history of the kingdom of Judah to your attention today, nearly 3,000 years after the fact. The reason I am doing this is that I submit to you that the picture that we find of spiritual compromise, of spiritual adultery, of lack of separation, of neglect of the Word of God, in the nation of Judah nearly 3,000

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years ago, is exactly the situation that we find in much of the nominally evangelical church in the 21st century.

This tragic situation is true in the church as a visible body today because that situation is true in the hearts and lives of many people who call themselves born-again Christians today. The vast majority of professing Christians today are not living lives of separation unto God and separation from the world. In far too many cases, and with few and precious exceptions, the state of the visible church today is that of the visible body that has become saturated with the influences of the unbelieving world, instead of being a godly influence upon the unbelieving world.

Much of the church is in a horrendous state because of the neglect of the Word of God. There is more and more worldly entertainment in so-called evangelical churches today in place of the expositional preaching of the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. Much of the so-called evangelical church today is far more concerned about what pleases unbelievers than it is about what pleases God.

Many of these churches today have very impressive edifices, but spiritually speaking they are just as much heaps of rubbish inside as the temple of Josiah's day was in a physical way before he ordered it to be cleaned and repaired and rededicated to the service of God. In much of the church today, with few and precious exceptions, spiritually speaking, God's Word has been tossed into the

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rubbish, tossed into the debris of compromise, just as it was physically tossed into the trash pile in the temple of Josiah's day.

Much of the church is engaged in spiritual adultery today. Much of the church is involved in spiritual prostitution today. Parents in these churches are not physically sacrificing their children to pagan gods as the people of Judah did, but they might as well be, because they are sacrificing their children spiritually on the altar of worldliness. And so these young people never understand the Word of God, the Word of Christ is never at home within them, and these young people, large numbers of them, are on the road to eternal Hell.

And today so many people and so many leaders in the nominally evangelical church are so deadened to these things, so lacking in understanding about what God's Word says about these things, that they cannot see how anything is wrong. But things are seriously wrong.

Dear friends, the individual Christian and the local church who do not obey God's command to be separate from the world and its ways and its thinking are missing the greatest opportunity that God gives to His people, and that is the opportunity to be strong for Him and for His truth.

The history of spiritual failure among the people of God is a history of failure because of neglect of the doctrine of Biblical separation, and that neglect has resulted from neglect of God's command to "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom."

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The history of spiritual victory among the people of God, in the pages of Scripture and throughout all history since then, is the history of people who have been committed to the proposition that the Word of Christ must have unbridled influence and authority, in every area of life and ministry. This is why it is essential for us to study and to understand the Biblical doctrine of separation.

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