

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "The True Scope of Separation" (Colossians 3:16-17, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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As we continue our study of the Biblical doctrine of separation, let me once again call your attention to the passage that has served as the theme Scripture for this series of messages, in Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 16.

As always, I hope that if you are able to do so as you are listening that you will open your own copy of God's Word and follow along with me. Just this week we heard about a lady who listens to these broadcasts who said that she needs a new Bible because her present copy of God's Word is worn out from reading it.

Dear friends, let me say with all sincerity that I hope that you too will wear out your Bible. You need to be in the Word of God every day. You need to be reading God's Word regularly and systematically. And whenever you hear the Word of God preached, you need to open the Bible for yourself if it is at all possible.

You need to have the Word of God before you. You need to follow along so that you will derive the greatest possible benefit from the preaching of the Word. And today, and in the programs to come, we are going to be not only looking at this passage in Colossians, but also at several other passages of Scripture.

And so, with these things in mind, let us begin again in Colossians chapter 3 at verse 16. The Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes these commandments to the people of God:

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

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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.

All Spiritual Compromise Is Sin

In these verses, the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is giving us the Christian's great defense against spiritual compromise. The opposite of Biblical separation is un-Biblical compromise. All compromise with this present evil world is spiritual compromise. All compromise is, at its core, spiritual in nature. All compromise with the world has a spiritual origin, and all compromise with the world has spiritual consequences and effects.

And all spiritual compromise is sin in the eyes of God. And so the true believer on the Lord Jesus Christ must forsake compromise with the unbelieving world at all costs, and without hesitation. We are commanded to forsake compromise in the same way that we are commanded to forsake every other kind of sin.

In our last message in this series we saw in Galatians chapter 2, verse 5, that when certain individuals came in and tried to lead the church at Jerusalem into compromise with unbelief, the Apostle Paul says that "we did not yield submission [to them] even for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue..." He resolved not to enter into compromise "not even for an hour." In fact, in the original language of the New Testament, that phrase could legitimately be translated "not even for a moment." There was no hesitation.

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Biblical Separation Is Not Legalism

And it is noteworthy that the compromise that some men were trying to bring into the church at that particular time was a compromise with legalism. It was a compromise with the false idea that you needed something in addition to the person and work of Christ in order to be saved. It was compromise with the false idea that you needed to perform works of your own in addition to the finished work of Christ in order to be saved.

That, dear friends, is the essence of legalism: the idea that you can do anything that would contribute in the least little way to your own salvation. That is a damnable falsehood. You can do nothing to save yourself from God's wrath. Salvation is all of God. It is all of Christ. It is nothing of us. The person who thinks he can add the least little thing to the atoning work of Jesus Christ is, in fact, a legalist. Anyone who thinks he can do anything to earn merit with God is a legalist.

And this incident that is recorded for us in Galatians also reminds us that true Biblical separation is not legalism. Now dear friend, if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you endeavor to obey God's command to come out from among the unbelieving, and to be spiritually separate from this present evil world – if you endeavor to do that, many people, including, it is sad to say, some professing Christians, will accuse you of legalism.

But true Biblical separation is not legalism. True Biblical separation is not an effort to earn merit with God. True Biblical separation is obedience to the

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commands of God to be separated from compromise with the ungodly influences of this present evil world and to be separated unto our holy and living God.

True Biblical separation is a recognition of the fact that God in Christ has sanctified you positionally. God has set you apart from the world, in Christ himself. You belong to Him. The Apostle Paul in First Corinthians chapter 6 verse 19 reminds us of this:

Do you not know [he says] 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? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

You are not your own, you have been bought at a price. And that price was not silver or gold or any other corruptible thing. That price was not any product or work of man. That price was not any product or work of yours. It was not baptism. It was not church membership. It was not good works. The price of your salvation, the price that purchased you and set you apart from this present evil world, is the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And therefore, if you are truly saved, it is incumbent upon you, it is an imperative, for you to become more and more like your Savior. It is imperative for you to become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, more and more conformed to His image, and the Spirit of God will do that work within the true believer who submits to that work of God.

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Biblical Separation Is Not Merely Ecclesiastical

Dear friends, some people who have been listening to this series of messages on the doctrine of Biblical separation have been asking me a question. They have asked the question in different ways, but it all comes down to this. They are asking me, "When are you going to begin talking about the issues of 'us versus them'?" When are you going to begin talking about the fact that we need to be ecclesiastically separated? When are you going to start talking about the fact that we need to refrain from holding hands organizationally with people who do not take the stand that we take?

Now those are legitimate questions. But so often among those who are concerned about separation today, that is as far as the issue goes for them. And dear friends, that is a very tragically limited and superficial view of the doctrine of separation. That is a view of the doctrine of separation that opens the door to a whole range of spiritual problems.

If that is the full extent of your focus when it comes to the issue of separation, then you leave yourself wide open to many snares of the Devil. And one of the greatest snares of the Devil is pride. People can become so proud of the fact that they don't associate with certain churches or denominations because those churches or denominations don't take a Biblical stand on critical issues.

And it is right that we should do that. But if we do that without realizing that there is so much more to the doctrine of separation, then we have failed. We have

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failed the Lord. Separation is not merely a matter of being anti-ecumenical. Biblical separation is so much more.

You see, if you look closely at the Word of God from beginning to end, you will come to understand that the doctrine of Biblical separation and the doctrine of the sanctification of the believer are inseparable in the eyes of God and in the plan of God.

I believe that today the majority of those who still call themselves "separatist" have lost sight of the fact that Biblical separation is not merely ecclesiastical. Separation is commanded as the keynote of the Christian's entire way of life and entire way of thinking on both the corporate and the personal levels. And the fact is, that there can be no true ecclesiastical separation unless the people who desire to take a separated stand are personally, individually, separated from this present evil world and separated unto God in their thinking and in their living..

It is the height of hypocrisy to say with pride, "We don't have anything to do with this group or that group because they take an un-Biblical stand on issues X, Y, and Z" when at the same time, within our own ranks, we as individuals are living lives of compromise with this present evil world in so many other ways. What hypocrisy it is to say that we do not associate with those who do not believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God when at the same time we reserve the right to pick and choose what parts of God's Word we will obey and disobey.

And we see that far too often today. We see people compartmentalizing their lives, as Solomon did in ancient Israel. People saying that God's Word can have

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authority over this part of my life but God's Word does not and cannot have authority over these other parts of my life. And the same sort of thing in the church. Dear friends, that is an abomination in the eyes of God.

Separation and Sanctification

Dear friends, if you look at the language of Scripture, you will find that the terms that are used in the Word of God for sanctification and separation are essentially synonymous. We have been positionally sanctified in Christ. We have been set apart from the world in Him.

And because that is the case, personal sanctification on the part of the individual Christian and corporate sanctification on the part of the church are both spiritual imperatives. They are commands of God. But the balance is that personal and corporate sanctification are also not legalism. Personal and corporate sanctification do not earn us a standing with God. They are imperatives because in Christ we already have a standing with God, and we need to think and to live in the light of that standing.

That is what the Apostle Paul means when he tells the Philippian believers, in Philippians chapter 2, verse 12, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Now many people will try to tell you that this is a verse that teaches salvation by works, or salvation by faith plus works. It teaches nothing of the kind.

A more literal rendering of these words would be this: "Do that which is the fitting result of your own salvation with fear and trembling." The fitting result of

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salvation, the fitting result of being set apart by God in Christ for eternity, is that the Christian should be more and more separated from the evil influences of this world and more and more separated unto God and His holiness. And the same is true for the church as body.

And how is that accomplished? It is not accomplished in any sense by any kind of legalism. Notice what the Apostle Paul says in the next verse in Philippians, Philippians chapter 2 verse 13. And let me begin reading again at verse 12 so that you will see the connection: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" – in other words, do that which is the fitting result of your own salvation with fear and trembling, do that which is obedient unto God, because, verse 13 – "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

The Apostle Paul gives us the same thought in Second Corinthians chapter 3, verse 5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves [he says] to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God..." The Biblically separated believer is not a legalist. The Biblically separated believer is not seeking to operate in his own self-righteousness.

The Biblically separated believer has no sufficiency in himself. His sufficiency is of God. His sufficiency to accomplish God's command to "come out from among them and be separate" comes from God himself. It comes from His enabling. It comes, as we are told in Colossians chapter 3, as you "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."

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True Biblical separation comes not by our own works, but by the work of God as we submit to Him. Colossians chapter 3, verse 17, once again: "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" because He is the one who by His Word and by His Spirit enables and equips you to be spiritually separated from this world and separated unto the Lord.

And so, "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Let the Word of God have unrestricted authority within your own soul as an individual. Let the Word of God have unrestricted authority within the church as a body. Let there be no compartmentalization. Let there be no area of our thinking and living either individually or corporately that we would dare to try to place off-limits to the Word and the work of God.

This is in absolute contrast to the mindset that we find in so much of the visible church today. We find a mindset of un-Biblical tolerance. But dear friends, we must recognize that the kind of tolerance that is being promoted and even demanded within many churches and institutions today is, in fact, *intolerance* of the truth of God. Rejection of the truth of God.

Many men and women who profess to be Christians are saying in effect, I know better than God. God's Word may say that man hasn't changed and men never will change apart from the saving work of Christ, but I reject that; we reject that. That is the essence of so much of what we find today. Individual Christians today, and churches as bodies of believers today, need to utterly reject this kind of thinking.

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We must "come out from among them, and be separate" – not merely ecclesiastically, but in every way. The true scope of Biblical separation is total. No area of thinking or living or association is outside the scope of God's command.

God's "Master Command" to Israel's Kings

Now as we continue to consider these matters, I want to return our focus once again to the record of the life of King Solomon of Israel. Long before there were ever kings in Israel, centuries before the first kingdom was established under Saul, centuries before the kingdom of David or Solomon, God warned Israel about the desire that they would have to live under the rule of an earthly king instead of under the kind of theocracy that God prescribed in the wilderness.

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you are able, to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 17. Deuteronomy chapter 17, beginning at verse 14. God said this to the nation of Israel, even before they entered the Promised Land, even while they were still in the wilderness:

When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, "I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me," you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to

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you, "You shall not return that way again." Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel. (Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

The very areas that God dealt with in this passage in Deuteronomy were the areas of Solomon's great compromises, which began very early in his reign as king. As we look at the life of Solomon, we find that there was sinful compromise in three major areas. And we find the sin of compromise manifesting itself in these same three areas throughout the Word of God, and also in the subsequent history of the church up to the present day.

Now I don't normally like to use outlines that all start with the same letter of the alphabet, because that can be a very artificial way of looking at the Word of God. But in this particular case, we do find that compromise manifests itself in three

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areas that in the English language all begin with the same letter of the alphabet.

Solomon's compromise, the compromise that God warned against centuries before Solomon's time, and the compromises that we find subsequently in the history of Israel and in the history of the church, are primarily in the areas of relationships, religion, and resources. Relationships, religion, and resources.

And as we continue this series of messages, the Lord willing we are going to see so much more that we can learn from the life of Solomon that will benefit us and protect us from the influences of this present evil world, and will draw us closer to our great God, if we will only read and study and heed His precious Word, by the power of the indwelling Spirit.

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