

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Lust vs. Separation" (Colossians 3:16-17, 1 John 2:15-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/14/2014

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Today we are continuing our study of one of the most important doctrines for the Christian as an individual and for the church as the body of Christ, and that is the doctrine of separation. Biblical separation. In recent messages we have been focusing on two passages of Scripture that bear very directly on this doctrine. One of them is found in Colossians chapter 3 and the other is found in the First Epistle of John in chapter 2. As always, if you are able to do so, I hope that you will open your own Bible with me today as we begin.

The Separating Authority of Scripture

And we will begin in Colossians chapter 3 at verse 16. These verses give us the two great authorities that govern the living and the thinking of the believer. The first principle is that the written Word of God must have absolute authority, complete authority, comprehensive authority, separating authority, in the life of the individual believer and in the life of the church. Colossians chapter 3 beginning at verse 16:

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom..

And let me remind you that a literal rendering of these words would be, "Let the Word of Christ be completely at home within you." The Christian individually and the church as a body must have no barred doors against the authority of the Word of God. No compartmentalization. As we read in the book of Hebrews, at chapter 4 beginning at verse 12,

The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-

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edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner [in the original language, a critic] of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight [from God's sight], but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

All things are naked and open to God. It is futile, it is sinful, it is foolish, to think that we can, figuratively speaking, bar the door against the Word of God in any area of our living and our thinking, and say, in effect, to the Holy Spirit, "This far, but no further." "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

So first of all, our approach to the Biblical doctrine of separation must be governed by the fact that the rightful place of the written Word of God is one of supreme and comprehensive authority in the life of the Christian and in the life of the church.

The Separating Authority of Christ

Secondly, in verse 17 of Colossians chapter 3, we have this:

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.

Just as the written Word of God is our authority, also the living Word of God, the Word incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ, is our supreme authority. Everything, in word or deed, all of it, must be worthy of being said and done in the name of the Lord

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Jesus Christ. These are the great governing imperatives of the Biblical doctrine of separation.

Separation: Opposing Our Natural Tendency

And then as we have also focused our attention on the Epistle of First John chapter 2 beginning at verse 15, we have found another imperative of the Biblical doctrine of separation, and that is the command that believers are, in the original language of First John 2:15, to stop loving the world. Self-sacrificial love for this present evil world is the natural tendency of the heart of a sinner. But the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John commands us to stop doing that.

And in our last message, we saw what love for this present evil world indicates about an individual. It indicates a lack of the love that God the Father has. Self-sacrificial love for this present evil world and self-sacrificial love for the redemption of men from this present evil world so that they might live in the world to come – those two kinds of love are incompatible. They cannot coexist. They cannot both and at the same time be the governing principle of the life of the individual Christian or the governing principle of the life of the church.

We have also seen that we find a chain of logic in these verses in First John chapter 2. Let me read those verses for you again, and if you are able to do so I hope that you will turn there with me, First John chapter 2, beginning at verse 15.

And as I read, notice the connective logical words that are used in these verses.

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Notice the use of the word "if." Notice the use of the word "for." Notice also the use of the word "but". All of these words indicate a logical order, a logical arrangement of things in the mind of God, in the economy of God, which demands separated living on the part of the individual Christian and on the part of the church. 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 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.

Separation: A Key Indicator of Regeneration

We have seen, first of all, the command to the Christian and to the church not to love this present evil world or the things that are in this present evil world. And we have seen that if this is not the case – if someone is holding onto *agape* love, self-sacrificial love, for this present evil world, it means that the love of the Father is not in him.

In other words, this is an indicator that the individual who is in this kind of condition needs to examine himself to see if he is truly in the faith, because his life, his attitude toward this present evil world, his self-sacrificial love for this present evil world and for the things of this world, is an indicator, is evidence, that the individual who exhibits such behavior is not truly born again. By his lack of separated thinking

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and living, that individual gives every indication that he is an unsaved person.

Dear friends, the Biblical doctrine of separation is that serious. In 2 Corinthians chapter 13 at verse 5, the Apostle Paul dealt with this same issue. He was dealing with a church at Corinth that was exhibiting the same kind of behavior. And so he says, 2 Corinthians 13:5 –

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified [literally, in the original language, unless indeed you do not stand the test].

All This Present World Can Offer: Lust and Pride

And then in First John chapter 2 verse 16, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John tells us why love for this present evil world is an indicator that an individual does not stand up to the test of being in the faith. At the beginning of verse 16 we have the logical connective word "for". In other words, John is saying, what I just said is true because what I am about to say is true. And then he says this, verse 16:

For [because] all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And [furthermore] the world is passing away, and the lust of it...

Now dear friends, this is a very rich statement, very rich in the original language. We need to examine these words carefully in order to understand what is at stake in

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the Biblical doctrine of separation.

First of all, let me call your attention once again to the opening words of First John 2:16 – "For all that is in the world". In the original language of the New Testament, the word "all" is used here in the collective sense. In other words, what the Holy Spirit is telling us through the Apostle John is that the three things that follow in this verse – "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" – constitute the entire essence of this present evil world under the curse of sin. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."

That is all that this present evil world can offer. That is what governs the living and thinking and speaking of this present evil world.

The Meaning of "Lust"

Now, what are these things? Well first of all, we need to understand the word "lust" that is used in this verse. In the Greek the word has to do with a desire or a craving for that which is forbidden. It is a word that describes the basic impulses of the natural man under the curse of sin, separated from God, and at enmity with God.

It has to do with a desire for that which is forbidden that is rooted in the foolish thought that there is something to be gained by pursuing that which is forbidden. And the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John tells us that the sum total of this kind of impulse finds its expression through the flesh, through the eyes, and through pride.

We see this for the very first time in Scripture as Eve fell prey to the temptation of

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the serpent, the Devil, in Genesis chapter 3. Turn with me, if you are able, to Genesis chapter 3 at verse 6. Genesis chapter 3, verse 6:

So when the woman saw [or perceived] that the tree was good for food [here we have the lust of the flesh], that it was pleasant to the eyes [here we have the lust of the eyes], and a tree desirable to make one wise [here we have the pride of life], she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Dear friends, we are on very solid Biblical ground if we understand that the first sin of our first parents was not taking the fruit and eating it, but was in falling prey to the temptation of Satan with the result that these three overarching lusts sprang up in their hearts. The outward eating of the fruit was the expression of an inward fall into sin that had already taken place. And the same things have plagued every descendent of our first parents up to the present day.

The Lust of the Flesh

The lust of the flesh has to do with the fact that apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, apart from the new birth, the body of every human being is controlled and energized and motivated by our fallen nature. In thousands of different ways, we all desire what feels good to our flesh even though so much of it is harmful to our spirits.

The Apostle Paul speaks of these things earlier in Colossians chapter 3. Turn with

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me, if you are able, to Colossians chapter 3 at verse 5. Colossians chapter 3, verse 5:

Therefore [if indeed you are a Christian, Paul says] put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul calls these sinful actions "your members which are on the earth." The picture that we are given is that these sinful actions of the flesh are as much a part of us as our arms or legs or fingers. And in so much of the church today, because the Biblical doctrine of separation is not being taught, people are actually being encouraged and affirmed in these kinds of sins.

People in self-described evangelical churches today are being told that it is all right to live in a physical relationship with someone outside of marriage. They are being told that it is all right to covet the things of this world, and they have the example of covetousness in mega-church pastors who accumulate wealth for themselves today, and churches that conduct classes and seminars on planning and preparing to accumulate this world's goods for the short span of years that we spend on this earth, rather than preparing people for eternal life in the world to come.

In many churches today we have a constant appeal to the sensory and to the sensual, especially in the so-called worship service. Much of what calls itself the evangelical church today is in fact cultivating the lust of the flesh rather than instructing people

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that if they are truly believers in the Lord Jesus Christ they will, as Paul says in Colossians 3:5, put these things to death in their lives and in their thinking.

Literally, the Apostle Paul says, slay these things. Make them dead. Deprive them of their power. Destroy their strength. But instead, much of the church today, ignoring and even opposing the Biblical doctrine of separation, encourages people to keep these things alive, to feed these things, to strengthen these things in their lives instead of putting them to death.

The Lust of the Eyes

And then in First John chapter 2 verse 16, we next have reference to "the lust of the eyes" as a component or an expression of the sum total of all that is in the world under the curse. What does this involve? It involves living according to false values that are based on outward appearances rather than on inward reality.

Let me also submit to you that it has to do with sin in the mind. I have already spoken of that in giving the example of the temptation of Eve in the Garden. And we find our Lord Jesus saying the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 verses 27 and 28. Jesus said this:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart..

So often, our physical actions, our outward actions, are merely the expression of

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sin that has already taken root and has begun to put forth its evil fruit in the mind in response to what the eyes have seen. But this has not only to do with the kind of immorality of which Jesus spoke in stating the principal. It also has to do with a kind of vanity that delights in an impressive visual display of any kind.

We see that kind of vanity on display in the visual pomp and splendor of the Roman Catholic Church and other false churches that are given over to the elevation of sinful man clothed in ornate garments rather than the exaltation of Christ on His throne, the One who humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant in order that He might give His life a ransom for many.

We also see that kind of vanity, that kind of appeal to the lust of the eyes, in the various forms of entertainment that have taken the place of the worship of the one true and living God in much of the church today.

And so today, so much of the church is given over to the false credibility and the false value of outward appearances. In First Samuel chapter 16, we read that when the Lord sent Samuel to the household of Jesse to show him the one that He had chosen to succeed Saul as the King of Israel, Samuel looked at one of Jesse's sons named Eliab, and he thought to himself, this must be the one. He has a fine appearance. He is tall of stature. But we read in 1 Samuel 16:7 that

the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him [literally, I have rejected him].

For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward

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appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

And so, the Lord directed Samuel to choose and to anoint David, the youngest and the smallest, but one who was, as the Lord said, "a man after my own heart."

The Pride of Life

And then, in First John 2:16, we have the third component of "all that is in" this present evil world, and that is "the pride of life." In the original language, this is a very revealing term. It speaks of empty thinking. It speaks of a vain confidence in the resources of sinful man, a foolish confidence in the supposed stability of the things of this present evil world – and coupled with that, a contempt for the law of God.

We see so much of this in the visible church today. We see people who are concerned about being associated with a certain individual or group for the sake of status. For the sake of influence. Being associated with a certain man or a certain ministry for the sake of pride.

It can also take the form of pride in knowledge. But the individual who is truly growing in the knowledge of God will not have that kind of pride. The individual who is truly growing in the knowledge of God will also be growing in humility, because that individual will realize more and more how great his Lord and Savior is, and how small he himself is.

That Which Is Passing Away vs. He Who Abides Forever

These things, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," John

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says, are "all that is in the world." All that this world under condemnation and under the curse can offer. And these things, John says at the beginning of verse 17, are passing away. "The world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever."

And dear friends, as we continue with our next message in this series, I want to set before you and emphasize that particular point, that Biblical separation involves taking hold of and loving that which abides forever, and putting off and casting aside and putting to death that which is passing away, because this present evil world is passing away. And so I hope that you will join us again as we focus our attention on that tremendous truth.

About the Broadcast

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TeachingtheWord Ministries

Box 2533, Westminster, Maryland 21158 USA
In North America, toll-free 888-804-9655