

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "The Test of Separation" (Colossians 3:16-17, 1 John 2:15-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/7/2014

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As we continue our series of messages on the doctrine of Biblical separation, let me remind you once again of our theme passage for this series, which is found in Colossians chapter 3 beginning at verse 16.

Here we find the twin pillars of this doctrine: firstly, the authority of the written Word of God, holy Scripture, and secondly, the authority of the living Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians chapter 3, beginning at 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.

The Separating Authority of the Written Word

It is the careful study of the Word of Christ, the Word of God, that separates the Christian from the world. In the Gospel of John chapter 17, in His great high priestly prayer, Lord Jesus said this to the Father. He said,

I do not pray that you should take [believers] out of the world, but that You should keep them from the Evil One. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth. As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

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It is the Word of God that is the truth. It is the Word of God, the Word of Christ, that separates and sanctifies the believer. This is why it is so vital for us to be studying the Scriptures together, why it is so vital for the Scriptures to be faithfully preached in the churches, and why it is so vital for you personally, dear friend, to study the Scriptures with the kind of a heart of which the Apostle Paul speaks here in Colossians chapter 3 – a heart that will "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," submitting to the authority of the Word as the only infallible rule of faith and life.

The Separating Authority of the Living Word

And likewise, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is the truth. He is the personification of truth. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). And so, as a Christian you must do all things – "whatever you do in word or deed" – "in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Everything in your life, everything in your thoughts, everything in your speech, must be worthy of Christ's name. To sin, to deviate from this principle, is in fact to dishonor the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to cause the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be blasphemed.

New Birth, Radical Change

Now at the present time we are focusing on a critical aspect of the doctrine of

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separation that has its foundation in these two principles. One of the great truths of the doctrine of separation is that when an individual becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, that person's relationship to this present world changes – immediately, entirely, and radically.

Everyone of us is born into this world in sin. We are born as aliens from God. We are born into this world as the enemies of God because of our sin. But when God saves us, when He cleanses us of our sins, when God the Holy Spirit comes in indwells an individual and regenerates that individual, a radical change takes place in that person's relationship to this present evil world. You are no longer an alien to God. You are no longer an enemy of God. But you are now an alien in this present evil world. Spiritually speaking, you are at enmity with this present evil world that is under the sway of Satan.

Stop Loving the World

And so, we are told, in many places in Scripture, that we are not to love this present evil world. We have been examining one of the principal statements of that great truth together, in First John chapter 2 beginning at verse 15. If you are able to do so as you are listening, please turn with me to the epistle of First John, chapter 2 beginning at verse 15. Here is what God the Holy Spirit commands us:

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.

We have seen that the opening words of verse 15 in the original language actually read like this: "Stop loving the world." It is a strong imperative. Every Christian continually faces the temptation to love this present evil world and the things of this present evil world. And so we are commanded to cease doing that.

The Antithesis of Separation: Agape Love for This Present Evil World

And, we have seen that the word that is translated "love" here is the Greek word *agape*. Self-sacrificial love. It is the natural state of the sinner apart from Christ to have an attitude of self-sacrificial love toward this present evil world and toward the things of this present world. That is the natural attitude of the flesh. But we are not to walk according to the flesh, we are to walk according to the Spirit. And the work of the Spirit, the mind of the Spirit of God, is not to glorify this present evil world and the things of this present evil world but to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

Agape love is a love that springs from a sense of the preciousness of the object that is loved. Let me remind you of the working definition of *agape* love that I gave you in our last message: *Agape* love is self-sacrifice on behalf of that which you consider to be precious. For the believer, walking in the Spirit, this world is no longer precious.

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And in these verses the Apostle John tells us why this is to be the case. Notice the chain of logic that the Holy Spirit gives us through the pen of the Apostle John in these verses. First of all, we are given the command: "Do not love the world or the things in the world."

And then we have the test that is associated with that command – the test of obedience or disobedience: "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." If you have not stopped exercising agape love, self-sacrificial love, toward this present evil world and the things of this present evil world, it says this about you: "The love of the Father is not in [you]." Literally, in the original language, this verse says that "the love that the Father possesses is not in you."

What does this mean? It means that if you have not stopped loving this world and the things that are in this world, then by definition you consider this present world-system under the sway of Satan and the things that are associated with that sinful, perishing world-system to be precious. That is the kind of love that you have. But that is not the kind of love that the Father has.

What is the love that the Father possesses? We have seen that it is the love that is set before us in John 3:16 – the redeeming love of God in Christ. God the Father gave His only begotten Son as the full and final sacrifice for sin upon the Cross in order to redeem the entire created order from the curse that it is under.

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Christ died as part of the eternal plan of God to redeem a people for Himself so that they may live forever as the citizens of the New Heavens and New Earth, living in perfect righteousness under the lordship of Jesus Christ forever.

The life of God's people in the New Heavens and New Earth will be the ultimate fulfillment of the command that we are given in Colossians chapter 3. It is then that the Word of Christ will dwell in us in all of its fullness and perfection. It is then that it can and will truly be said that everything that we do and say and think, as the glorified people of God, will be worthy of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Which Kind of Love Do You Have?

And so that is the test that we have in First John 2:15: Which kind of love do you have? For what and for whom are you exercising self-sacrificial love? Is your self-sacrificial love a love for this present evil world and for the things of this present evil world? Or is your self-sacrificial love the love that the Father has – the love that desires the world to come, the love that desires the righteousness and the holiness of the world to come, the holiness that is to be found only in the person and work of Jesus Christ?

And so we have the command in verse 15, and we have the test in verse 15. But then in verses 16 and 17 we have the next step in the chain of logic. The Holy Spirit through the Apostle John tells us why this radical change in our

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attitude toward this present evil world, and this radical change in our attitude toward the things that God loves, is so supremely vital. Notice again verse 16:

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.

What is God telling us here, dear friends? The Holy Spirit is telling us that the Biblical doctrine of separation comes down to this question: Are you loving and living for that which is alive and eternal and righteous, or are you loving and living for that which is dead and dying and depraved?

Who Demonstrates That He Has Eternal Life?

And then at the end of verse 17, we have the final and ultimate test of these things: "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but [notice] he who does the will of God abides forever." What is the Holy Spirit saying to us? He is saying that your attitude toward this present evil world is a key indicator of whether or not you are truly saved.

Earlier in this series, we spoke of the myth of the so-called "carnal Christian" – the false idea that an individual can make a verbal profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but then continue to live just as he lived before. Dear friends, that false teaching denies the words that are before us. "He who does the will of

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God abides forever."

It is the person who demonstrates the radical change of attitude toward this present world and the things of this present evil world who is the one who does the will of God. In First Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 3 we read this: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" – your separation from this world and from the things of this present evil world.

The individual who is not seeking to obey God's command to stop loving this present evil world, this world that is hostile toward God, and to stop loving the things of this present evil world that seduce men away from God – the individual who makes these things and these attitudes his habit of life demonstrates that he is no Christian at all.

Yes, we all have times as Christians when we disobey God and even backslide concerning these things. But if the Holy Spirit is truly living within us, we will not be comfortable in that condition. And that is the distinction that we find in so much of the postmodern evangelical church today and among so many people who profess to be Christians. They are not comfortable with the things of God. They are not comfortable with the Word of God.

They are comfortable in this world. They are comfortable with the things of this world. And by this very attitude they demonstrate that the love of the Father, the love that God the Father possesses, the righteous love, the holy love of the Father, is not in them. The love of this present evil world is in them. The love of

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this present evil world and of the things of this present evil world is what controls them and motivates them. Not the love of the Father.

And so what is their condition? Verse 17 tells us that "he who does the will of God abides forever." This is speaking of eternal life. This is speaking of those who will live forever in the New Heavens and New Earth. And the logic of this verse is that for those who have not stopped loving this present evil world and the things of this present evil world, those who are not endeavoring to do that as a habit of life, those who do not demonstrate that change in attitude that comes only by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – the logic of this verse is that the person who is in that condition, the person who exhibits that kind of attitude in life, is not a Christian, is still under condemnation, is still under the wrath of God, is still on the way to eternity in Hell.

Excluding the Love of God

"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The way those words are given to us in the original language is very significant. It is not always possible to translate into a brief phrase in English all the riches that we find in the original Greek. What the original language is saying is that if anyone makes it his continual habit of life to love this present evil world and the things of this present evil world, then this very fact excludes the love that the Father possesses from this individual's life. Love for the things that God the Father loves does not exist in such an individual as the ruling principle of his life.

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We read in the fourth chapter of Colossians and again in the 24th verse of Philemon of a man named Demas. Demas was, for a time, associated with the Apostle Paul in his ministry. But then, toward the end of Paul's life, in Second Timothy chapter 4 verse 10, Paul tells Timothy that "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Like so many others throughout the pages of the New Testament and throughout the history of the church who seemed, for a time, to be believers, in the end, Demas forsook the faith. He forsook the Apostle Paul. Demas loved this present evil world. This present evil world was that which was truly precious to him. And so, he demonstrated that the love of the Father was not in him. He demonstrated that he was not of a mind and of a heart to do the will of God.

It is not the one who, by his thinking and by his living, demonstrates admiration and esteem for this present evil world and the things of this world who will live forever. It is not the person who loves this present evil world and the things of this world who demonstrates that he truly possesses the new birth. No. It is the one who does the will of God who "abides forever." This is the test of Biblical separation.

Facts Rarely Taught By An Opinion-Filled Church

Dear friends, it is a sad truth that you will not find these facts clearly stated in very many churches today. The professing church today is full of ungodly,

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compromising opinions on this subject. But dear friends, it is not the calling of the preacher of the Word of God to give you his opinions. That is not my calling. If I were merely giving you my opinions about these things, you would have every reason to turn off this message right now.

But I am not giving you my own opinions. It is my responsibility as a preacher of the Word of God to set before you God's plain, unvarnished truth – what the Word of God actually says. And it is my responsibility as a preacher of the Word to be continually in prayer that God the Holy Spirit will use His word to do the work that needs to be done in your heart as an individual. That is the most serious responsibility any man can have.

I don't know your heart, but God knows your heart. God knows the work that needs to be done in you. And so I pray that He will use His word as I set it before you each week to do that work. I am only His minister. My job is to be a servant of the Word. My job is to faithfully open the Word and place it before you.

And let me assure you, dear friends, that the things we are considering together are things that this preacher also needs to hear and to obey. The things that we are considering together in these messages are not pleasant to the flesh. They are not comfortable for the flesh. But the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 8 beginning at verse 12 declares that those who are truly believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, truly indwelt by the Holy Spirit,

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are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8:12-14)

That, dear friends, is the test of Biblical separation.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to obey Christ's Great Commission: preaching the Gospel to all, and equipping believers in Christ to live every area of life by the sole authority of Scripture, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

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