

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Adoption and Biblical Separation" (Colossians 3:1-4, 1 John 3:2-3)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 1 of 12

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Today we are continuing our consideration of the tremendous position, privileges, and responsibilities, of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ because of our adoption as sons of God. This study is part of our larger consideration, at the present time, of the great imperative that we find in Colossians chapter 3 beginning at verse one. Please follow along with me in your own copy of God's Word, if you are able, as I read these verses for us – Colossians chapter three, beginning at verse one:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

In recent broadcasts, we have seen that the foundation of this great imperative to set our minds on things above, and not on things on the earth, is our position in Christ. The entire statement is prefaced by the words, "If then you were raised with Christ..."

Every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ has been raised with Christ. We are the adopted sons of God. We have this new relationship because, when God saved us, He did so by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, who is called "the Spirit of adoption."

In our last message we saw that because this is true, all three persons of the

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 2 of 12

---

Godhead are involved in the adopted son of God's exercise of the great privilege of prayer. Even the things that you cannot articulate, even the things that in your flesh you cannot properly present as a petition before your loving Father, even those things are clearly articulated on the most intimate terms possible before our heavenly Father. The persons of the Godhead are literally speaking with each other on our behalf as we pray, because we are the adopted sons of God. That is the privilege that is ours because we have been raised with Christ. That is why we must seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of the Father.

### **Future Glory and Present Responsibility**

And so the statement we are considering *begins* with the present fact that each of us has been raised with Christ. That is our position of present privilege. And, in verse four, the imperative *ends* with the promise of future glory. Because we are in this new relationship with the persons of the Godhead, we will appear with Christ in glory. That is guaranteed by the fact that God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Adoption, is living within us. And this is why the Apostle John, in his first epistle, in chapter 3, verse two, says this:

Beloved now we are the sons of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He [Jesus] is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He [Jesus] is pure.

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 3 of 12

---

You see, dear friends, the promise of future glory for the adopted sons of God at the return of Jesus Christ also involves *present responsibility* for the adopted sons of God in this present world. Because we have this hope, John says, we are to purify ourselves. We are to separate ourselves from the things of this world. We are to set our minds not on things on earth, but on things above. This is why the Apostle Paul says, in Second Corinthians chapter 7, verse one,

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

The words that are rendered "perfecting holiness" in our English Bibles mean, in the original Greek, that we are to *make holiness our goal*. We are to be at work to achieve that end. That is what the Apostle Paul means when in Philippians chapter 2, beginning at verse 12, he writes this:

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Dear friends, listen to me carefully. This is a description of the grace of sanctification, not a description of salvation by works. God's work of saving us is unilateral. He does it all. We do nothing. It is not a cooperative effort in any sense. Salvation is not brought about by a combination of faith plus works. It is by faith in Christ alone.

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 4 of 12

---

But sanctification is a different matter. The purifying of ourselves that we are to be continually striving for, in view of the hope that we have of future glory with Christ – that purifying, that sanctifying, involves what this verse calls a "working out." The Greek verb that is rendered "work out" in the phrase "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," does not at all mean that we are to work *for* our salvation. It is a word that means that we are to be doing the thing which is the *result* of our salvation, the thing that is fitting and proper *because* of our salvation. And the thing that is fitting and proper is that we are to be cleansing ourselves, as Paul writes to the Corinthians. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

### **The Keynote of Our New Relationships: Separation**

And so this brings us to another very vital aspect of the picture we are considering. It is a very vital aspect of seeking those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. And it is a very practical matter.

Our adoption as sons of God involves new relationships not only with the persons of the Godhead, but also new relationships with other people. Now there are two aspects to this. We have a new relationship with believers in Christ, and we also have a new relationship with unbelievers. And so today let us continue our study by taking up these two aspects of this great doctrine of adoption.

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 5 of 12

---

Let me first put before you the central fact of these new relationships. What is the keynote of these new relationships? The keynote is the word *separation*. Believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, those who have been brought into this new relationship as the adopted sons of God, are to be separated people. There are two aspects to this separation. We are to be separated *unto* God, and we are to be separated *from* the world. Separated unto God, and separated from the world.

That is the theme that we have in Colossians chapter 3. Because you been raised with Christ, Paul says, you are to set your mind on things above, where Christ is. You are to be separated *unto* God. And also because you have been raised with Christ, Paul says, you are not to set your mind on things on earth. You are to be separated *from* the world.

Now, the Lord willing, at a future time I want to take up the Biblical doctrine of separation in more detail in another series of studies. Here is why I want to do that: Just as the doctrine of the believers' adoption as sons is a neglected teaching in the church today, the doctrine of Biblical separation is also a neglected teaching in our time. And so, the Lord willing, at a future time I want to take it up in more detail.

But let me put before you at the present time some basic elements of this very important doctrine, the doctrine of Biblical separation, as it relates to our responsibilities as the adopted sons of God.

The Word of God commands believers to walk in holiness before the Lord, the church, and the world. Believers individually, and the church corporately, are

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 6 of 12

---

separated positionally. We are called out of the world, and we are placed in Christ. And so, we must think and we must act in a manner that is consistent with that standing, in every area of life and ministry.

The reason for this is that the God we serve is a holy God. We serve a God who is totally separate from this world under the curse. We serve a God who is morally perfect. We serve a God who commands this, in First Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 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 at the revelation of Jesus Christ; [notice] 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 of your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Dear friends, the standard of separation, the standard of holiness, is God himself – "He who has called you." And the standard of separation is all-encompassing. It is "in all manner of conduct." And because this is true, the standard of separation must govern our relationships with all kinds of people, both the saved and the unsaved.

### **Our Relationship With Fellow Believers**

Everyone else who is a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, everyone else who has been given the adoption as sons by God, is your adopted brother in Christ. And this

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 7 of 12

---

includes not only the believers who sit next to you in church, or share the same home with you, or live in the same town with you, but also the adopted sons of God who live in the next town, and in the next state or province, and in the next country, and all around the world. And it also includes the adopted sons of God who have gone on before us to glory, those who are at this very moment in the presence of the Lord. We are all one body, one family, in Christ.

That is why the Word of God, especially the New Testament, constantly refers to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as "brethren." We have a new family name. In Ephesians chapter 3, verse six, the Apostle Paul says that all believers, both Jew and Gentile, are "fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His [God's] promise in Christ through the Gospel..." And Paul continues in Ephesians chapter 3, verse 14 by saying this:

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [notice] from whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We are all of one family. And as brethren with all believers we have a new name.

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 8 of 12

---

We have Christ's name. Those who are already in Heaven, from the fall of man onward, those who are now on the earth, and those yet to come, all have the name of Christ. That is our family name. We are Christians. And only those who are truly believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and in Him alone for their salvation, have the right to be called by the name of Christ, to be called by that family name.

And because we have that name, we can seek to be strengthened with might through the Spirit of God, the Spirit of adoption. We can seek to be rooted and grounded in love, love for God, love for the things of Heaven, and love for one another, all of which is comprehended in the phrase "the love of God which passes knowledge."

We have the privilege of this great relationship with all the other saints of God, as the adopted sons of God, those who have received the Spirit of adoption, because of the grace of God extended to us through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Our New Non-Relationship With Unbelievers**

And dear friends, this also means that we have a new relationship with unbelievers as well. Listen to me carefully: Unbelievers are no longer our brothers. They are still in Adam. They are still dead in their trespasses and sins. They do not share our family name. We, as Christians, are no longer part of their family, the family of fallen Adam. We are no longer of the world.



Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Adoption and Biblical Separation" (Colossians 3:1-4, 1 John 3:2-3)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 9 of 12

---

We have a different family name, the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the dividing line. And that is why so much of the world today does not want to hear the name of Jesus Christ mentioned. Yes, you can mention God, but you cannot name the name of Christ. He is the one who makes the difference. That change of family name, from the family of fallen Adam, to the family of the triumphant Christ, is the momentous change that takes place when we are given adoption as sons by God.

And because we have a different family name, we have a different set of family interests. That new set of family interests centers not on the things of this earth but on the things of Heaven. That new set of family interests centers not on the glory of man but on the glory of God. And God calls us to live as is fitting for our new family name and our new family interests.

Second Corinthians chapter 5, verse 17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." The adopted son of God is a new creation. If we are truly new creatures in Christ, we will walk the walk – a walk that is worthy of the name of Christ. We are to be witnesses to the unsaved world.

### **Not Subjective, But Objective**

Now dear friends, let me point out to you a very vital fact about these new relationships, your relationships with both believers and unbelievers: These relationships are not subjective, but objective. The relationship between believer and believer as adopted sons of God is based upon the shed blood of Christ. It is a

---

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 10 of 12

---

relationship based upon the sole and absolute authority of the Word of God. It is a relationship that is an exclusive and not inclusive. It is a relationship that is based upon the narrow way, not the broad way. It is a relationship that is based not upon sinful tolerance but upon Biblical imperatives, not on man's varying opinions, but upon God's eternal and unchanging truth.

Now, the sad fact is that increasing numbers of people in the nominally evangelical church today do not want to hear this. They do not want to hear that truth is unchanging. They do not want to hear that our relationships within the body of Christ must be grounded in the truth of God's Word. But God the Holy Spirit tells us, in First Corinthians chapter 2, that you cannot understand the Word of God, you cannot receive the Word of God, you cannot accept it is true, you cannot base your thinking and your living upon it, unless you have received God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption. To establish false fellowship with those who have not received the Spirit of adoption is sin.

And so, as we think about the fact that we as the adopted sons of God have a new relationship with our fellow believers, our fellow adopted sons of God, and as we think about the fact that we have a new relationship – in fact a new non-relationship, spiritually speaking – with the unsaved world, this means that we must be very careful. We must first of all be certain that those with whom we are in fellowship are indeed the sons of God.

How are we to do that? We are to do that on the authority of the Word of God. The

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Title: "Adoption and Biblical Separation" (Colossians 3:1-4, 1 John 3:2-3)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 11 of 12

---

Apostle John emphasizes this in his first epistle, in chapter 4, verse one. He says,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets [many imposters, many who profess to be Christians but are not] have gone out into the world.

"Test the spirits." But what is the test? The test is the Word of God. The test is confession of faith in the true Christ of the Bible, and faith in Christ alone for salvation.

The Apostle John goes on in First John chapter 4 to say this, at verse five. He says that those within the visible church who are endeavoring to make common cause with genuine Christians but are not themselves genuine Christians – he says that these people are, First John chapter 4 verse five,

of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. [But, he says] we are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Now the word that is translated "hears" in this context has to do not simply with the faculty of being *able* to hear, but it has to do with having a *common understanding of things that are heard*. There are those who are within the church but have a common understanding of things with the world, a common way of looking at things with the world. And in this, they demonstrate that they are not of Christ.

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Title: "Adoption and Biblical Separation" (Colossians 3:1-4, 1 John 3:2-3)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/9/2014

Page 12 of 12

---

But, John says, verse six, "We [we who are truly believers – we] are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us." There is a common spiritual understanding among those who truly know God, who truly know the genuine Christ of the Bible. And so, John says, at the end of verse six, "By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

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