

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "The Key to Biblical Separation" (Colossians 3:16-17, 2 Peter 2:7-10)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/16/2014

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Let me call your attention once again to the command of God the Holy Spirit given to us through the pen of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossian church. Turn with me, if you are able to do so as you are listening, to the third chapter of the book of Colossians, beginning at verse 16.

Today I want to particularly emphasize the words that we find at the beginning and the end of these verses. First of all, verse 16: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." And then, secondly in verse 17: "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Why Study the Doctrine of Separation?

We are, at the present time, making a special study of the Biblical doctrine of separation. The Scriptures command God's people, in all ages, and in every situation, to be separated unto God, and separated from the world.

In our last message, we addressed the question: Why should we study this doctrine? Is it something that is still relevant in the 21st century? Has not the situation of the church changed, and has not the situation of man changed, in such a way that this doctrine perhaps no longer merits the kind of emphasis that it was given in prior generations of the church?

We saw that the answer to this question is that we must study this doctrine. It is a neglected doctrine in the church in our time. If anything, an understanding of the

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Biblical doctrine of separation is more critical for the individual Christian, and for the Church as a body, than it has ever been before.

The Failure of Israel

In our last message, we looked at passages in Second Kings chapters 22 and 23 that showed us the failure of Israel to keep the commands of God to be separated from the surrounding pagan nations, and to be separated unto God Himself, who dwelled among them.

And as we look at the rest of the Old Testament, from the days of Israel's exodus from Egypt and journeys in the wilderness and conquest of the Promised Land, all the way through to the time when the northern kingdom of Israel went into captivity in Assyria, in the southern kingdom of Judah went into captivity in Babylon, and even after the return of a remnant from these exiles – throughout all the centuries, we see a continual record of compromise with the pagan nations.

We see spiritual adultery on the part of God's chosen nation. In fact for the most part, especially in the later centuries of their history recorded in the Old Testament, we see an open rejection by both Israel and Judah of God's imperative of spiritual separation.

We read in the opening chapters of the book of Judges that the children of Israel failed to completely drive out the pagans from the land that God sent them to enter and to conquer with His help. And so, in all of the subsequent centuries, the

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cultures of the pagans and the false religions of the pagans were a continual stumbling block for the children of Israel. They intermarried with the pagans. They neglected to teach their children the Word of God and the wonderful works of God that had been done on their behalf.

We find as we read the Old Testament that the generation of Israelites whom God brought up out of Egypt in the great Exodus rejected Him. They wanted to go back and lie down peacefully among the pagans in Egypt. God rightly called them stiff-necked and rebellious. And for this reason, that entire generation died in the wilderness. God did not let them enter the Promised Land. Out of all that generation, out of the millions of people who came out of Egypt, God permitted only two faithful men, Caleb and Joshua, to enter the Promised Land.

We also find in the book of Judges that the generation that went into the Promised Land, when they had settled down in it, failed to teach the next generation about the holiness and power of God. They failed to teach their children the imperatives of God concerning separation from the world and separation unto Him. And therefore that generation and the ones that followed were in continual distress because the Philistines and the Midianites and the other surrounding pagan nations brought Israel into both spiritual and physical bondage.

One of the places in which this sad history is summarized for us is in the 78th Psalm. And in that Psalm, we find these remarkable words, beginning in verse 40. Psalm 78, beginning at verse 40:

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How often they provoked [God] in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power... [Psalm 78:40-42]

The Responsibility of the Church

Dear friends, God made the imperative of separation abundantly clear to Old Testament Israel. And He has made that imperative just as abundantly clear to the New Testament church. In previous messages, I have called your attention to one of the primary passages on the doctrine of separation in the New Testament, which is found in Second Corinthians chapter 6, beginning at verse 10 and extending into the beginning of chapter 7.

In Second Corinthians chapter 6, in verses 16 through 18, the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit speaks words to the New Testament church which are in fact a summary of a number of Old Testament passages that were first spoken to the nation of Israel.

Turn with me to Second Corinthians chapter 6 if you are able, Second Corinthians chapter 6 beginning at verse 16. The Apostle Paul in the previous verses has asked a series of questions that point out the fact that there can be no fellowship or communion or agreement between believers and unbelievers. We are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, verse 14. And then in verse 16 Paul says this: "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God."

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In other words, just as the physical land of Israel, and the physical temple in Israel, where the dwelling place of God on earth under the Old Covenant, the individual believer in Christ, and the body of believers in Christ corporately, are the temple, the dwelling place of the living God in this New Covenant age.

God's dwelling place is much more personal and intimate than it was under the Old Covenant. And Paul reminds New Testament believers that because they are now the dwelling place of the living God, the temples of the Holy Spirit, they are under the same imperative of separation that the physical nation of Israel was under in the Old Covenant economy. And so Paul summarizes the commands that God gave to Israel, as commands to the New Testament church. Second Corinthians chapter 6, verse 16, we read this:

As God has said [in other words, as God said to Israel He also now says to you], "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Verse 17 is likewise a summary of commandments to Israel under the old economy that apply to the New Testament church with even greater force. Verse 17:

Therefore, "come out from among them [come out from among unbelievers, come out from among them spiritually] and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean [unclean spiritually], and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

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And so in the very next verse, in Second Corinthians chapter 7 verse one, Paul drives the point home to New Testament believers. He says this:

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

A Matter of Not Grieving or Quenching the Spirit

And we also find the same kinds of words in the New Testament concerning the grief that a lack of separation brings to our God – the same kinds of words that we found in Psalm 78, where we are told that Israel grieved God, and tempted God, and limited God, because they forgot His holiness, they forgot His greatness, they forgot His power, and in fact they rejected His command to be separate from unbelievers because they thought they knew better.

Dear friends, let us never think that we know better than God. And because we are still in the flesh, because we are still sinners, we can tend to do that. But what do we read in the New Testament? We read the same things that we find in Psalm 78 and elsewhere in the Old Testament.

In Ephesians chapter 4 verse 30, we are told, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." And in First Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 19 we are commanded, "Do not quench the [Holy] Spirit." A more literal rendering would be, "Do not suppress or stifle or repress or smother the influence of the Spirit of God."

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We do just that – we grieve the Spirit, we limit the influence of the Spirit – when we enter into compromise, when we enter into relationships with the world, especially in spiritual endeavors, when God commands us absolutely not to. We must not reject the doctrine of separation as Israel so often and openly and stubbornly rejected it. We must not throw out God's command to come out from among unbelievers and be separate.

"A Holy Nation"

It was because Israel threw the commandments of God behind their backs in previous generations that when their Messiah came to earth the first time, they rejected Him. And so, in Matthew chapter 21, Jesus said to the religious leaders of Israel, Matthew chapter 21, beginning at verse 43, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."

And who is that nation? We are given the answer in First Peter chapter 2. Beginning in First Peter chapter 2 verse seven, Peter calls to mind the same words that Jesus spoke against the Jews in Matthew chapter 21. First Peter chapter 2, verse seven:

Therefore, to you who believe, He [Jesus] is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "the stone which the builders rejected [that is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel], has become the chief corner stone," and "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the Word, to which they also were appointed.

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But [notice, verse 9] you [the church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ in this present age] are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:7-10)

The nation that God has raised up in this present New Covenant dispensation is the Church, the body of Christ, one body of both Jew and Gentile, one body of all those who put their faith and trust in Him alone. And so what must this holy nation to whom Christ has given the kingdom of God do? How must we respond, how must we behave? Peter by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives us the answer in the next verse. First Peter chapter 2, verse 11:

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles [that is among unbelievers]...

And so, through Peter and Paul and the other New Testament writers, God the Holy Spirit gives us specific instructions, specific imperatives, that arise from and are necessary because of the imperative of separation from the world.

These specific instructions, the specific commands, take very specific forms in the New Testament. We are told to "flee" certain things. We are told to "put to

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death" or "mortify" certain things. We are told to "put off" certain things, and we are told to "put on" certain things.

I'm going to give you a number of Scriptures on these points very quickly, and you may not have time to turn to them. You may want to write them down as you hear them, or if you are able to do so, you can go to the Broadcast page on our website, at teachingtheword.org, and you can read a transcript of this broadcast in which you will be able to see all of the Scriptures that I'm about to give you.

"Flee"

First of all, we are told to flee certain things.

- 1 Corinthians 6:18 - "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."
- 1 Corinthians 10:14 - "Flee from idolatry."
- 1 Timothy 6:10-11 - "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness."
- 2 Timothy 2:22 - "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

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- James 4:4-8 - Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the Devil and *he* will flee from *you*. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

"Put To Death"

Secondly, we are told to "put to death" or "mortify" certain things:

- Romans 8:13 - "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."
- Colossians 3:5 - "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."
- 1 Peter 3:18 - "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit..."

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"Put Off"

Thirdly, we are told to "put off" the deeds that have to do with our sin nature:

- Colossians 3:8-10 - "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..."
- Ephesians 4:20-25 - "...if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we [separated believers] are members of one another.

"Put On"

And finally, we are told to "put on" certain things as a matter of separation from the world and separation unto God.

- Colossians 3:12-14 - "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing

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with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

- Romans 13:11-14 - "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

All In the Name of Christ

Dear friends, these things define the Biblical doctrine of separation. 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 separated positionally. We are called out of the world and placed into Christ. We must think and act in a manner that is consistent with that standing, in every area of life and ministry.

What is the key to that? We find it in the verse with which we began today's study, in Colossians chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom..." "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 that we do, all that we think, all that we say, must be worthy of having been said to have been done in

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the name of our holy God, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the definition of Biblical separation. Can you do it in the name of Christ? Does it pass the test of His holiness?

And so we must cry out to God with the psalmist David, as we read in Psalm 86, at verse 11: "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in your truth; unite my heart [give me singleness of heart] to fear Your name."

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