

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Note Well God's Poison Labels!" (Colossians 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/30/2014

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Today we are continuing our study of the command that we find many times in Scripture for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to be separated from the world and separated unto God. As we begin, let me remind you once again of the passage in the book of Colossians that gives us the key to the practical implementation of the doctrine of separation in the life of the believer and in the life of the church. Turn with me, if you are able as you are listening, to the book of Colossians chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. 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.

Let me remind you that in Colossians chapters 3 and 4, the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives instruction to believers on how to live every aspect of life in a separated manner – separated unto God, and spiritually separated from the world.

The Twofold Key

And in the verses we just read, the Apostle Paul gives us what we may accurately describe as a twofold key to this kind of living and thinking. The one side of the key is total submission to the Word of God. In order for believers to

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live in this present evil world in a manner that is nevertheless separated from the world and separated unto God, the Word of God must govern the life and thinking of the believer. It must have free reign within us.

As we have seen, the word that is translated "dwell" in Colossians 3:16 – "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" – more literally means "let it be fully at home within you." Someone who is fully at home is free to go anywhere within that home. That is the picture. We cannot compartmentalize our lives into those areas in which God's Word has free reign to govern our lives and those areas in which we seek to place restrictions on the Word of God, areas of our lives in which we effectively say to God and to His word, "You cannot come in here."

No, Paul says. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Give God's Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, full opportunity to be in charge of your thinking and your living. That is one side of the key to separated thinking and living – the authority of the Word of God, the careful and continual and systematic study of the Word of God.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," we read in Second Timothy 3:16, "and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..." The Word of God is designed to teach us how to live separated lives. That involves doctrine – sound doctrine. The Word of God is designed to reprove us when we stray outside of the boundaries of separated living. The Word

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of God is designed to correct us and to bring us back within the realm of separation from the world and separation unto God when we step outside God's limits. And the Word of God is designed to instruct us in how to maintain our lives and our thinking in that separated position. That is one side of the key to separated living.

The other side of the key that we find in Colossians 3:16 and 17 is total submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that we do, everything that we say, and therefore everything that we think, must be, as we read in Colossians chapter 1 verse 10, "worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him."

The first question that we should ask about anything that we would consider doing or saying is this: Is it worthy of the name of Christ? Can it be legitimately said or done in the name of Christ? Can what I am doing or saying or thinking legitimately have the stamp or the mark of His name upon it? Does what I am doing or saying or thinking as an individual Christian, does what my church is doing or saying or thinking as a body, adorn the name of Christ, or does it bring shame to the name of Christ?

The Highest Possible Standard

And these vital issues become even more crucial as we remember the main point of our last message, where we answered this question: What is the standard of separation? We found in Scripture that the question is actually not merely, "*What* is the standard of separation?" but, "*Who* is the standard of separation?" We found that God Himself, our holy God, our perfect God, our God who is

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completely separate from all defilement – He Himself is the standard of separation. In our last message, I read to you these words from First Peter chapter 1 verse 15:

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

The standard of separation is a high standard. In fact there could be no higher standard, because the standard is God Himself. His holiness. His separated-ness from all that defiles. Our holy God calls us to that high a standard. In our flesh, it is a standard that we cannot possibly live up to. We will not do it perfectly this side of glory. We can only live in a separated manner that is worthy of the Lord if we are continually searching the Scriptures, and continually keeping at the forefront of our minds the fact that Jesus Christ is our Lord, and that all that we do and say and think must be worthy of being done in His name.

Now that we have seen the Scriptural standard of separation, we can move on to consider other vital issues regarding separation. As I mentioned in our last message, we are moving from the realm of pure doctrine into the area of the application of doctrine. And so in order to understand how to apply this high standard of separation to our own lives individually, and to the life of the church as a body, we need to ask additional questions and see the answers from Scripture.

These questions follow a logical pattern. And as we ask these questions we must look to Scripture to give us the answers. Separation is an issue of sound doctrine,

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and all questions of doctrine must be settled by looking to Scripture alone.

Is Separation an Imperative?

The next question that we must ask is this: Is separation an imperative for the believer and for the church? Is this an essential Christian doctrine? Now in view of the things that we've just considered, this may seem to be an unnecessary question. The answer may seem to be obvious, and it may even seem illogical to pursue this question next.

But let me explain to you why we need to do this: Many in the nominally Evangelical church in the 21st century seem to think that separation as Scripture defines it is optional, or that separation only applies to certain situations, if separation is to be considered necessary at all. And many churches today are effectively saying that separation is an outmoded doctrine. They may not say this in so many words, but they certainly say it in the many compromises that they make with the unbelieving world. But what does Scripture say about this? Is separation optional for the church? Is separation optional for the individual Christian?

To answer that question, let me call your attention once again to a passage that we have looked at before in this series, in Second Corinthians chapter 6 beginning at verse 14. I would submit to you that these are some of the most neglected words, some of the most ignored words, some of the most misinterpreted words of Scripture in the visible church in our time. I would encourage you to turn to this passage with me again today if you are able, Second Corinthians chapter 6,

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beginning at verse 14. Here is the command of God:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial [or Satan]? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Much of the nominally Evangelical church in our time may choose to ignore or to minimize the words that we have just read, but the plain fact is that we have before us a set of the strongest possible commands. Listen to the words: "*Do not* be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" – "*Come out* from among them and be separate, says the Lord" – "*Do not* touch what is unclean."

Spiritual Poison

Dear friends, let me put it before you in this way: There are certain kinds of associations, certain things, and certain kinds of endeavors that God has labeled as spiritual poison. Things that God tells the Christian individually and the church corporately to avoid. Associations and endeavors that will undermine the

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Christian, and undermine the church.

It is the most foolish person in the world who would pick up a bottle of some substance that is clearly marked in large letters "POISON" and take that substance into his body. At a very minimum, there will be great pain and suffering. In the worst case, the result will be death. Many a visible church has experienced great spiritual pain and suffering because it ignored God's spiritual poison labels, and took things into the body of the church that God has clearly told us to be separated from. Many a visible church that was strong for God in the past has come to spiritual ruin or even ceased to exist because of such folly.

And what, according to the Word of God as we read it here, are such spiritual poisons? Let me first of all list them for you as we find them here in Second Corinthians chapter 6 beginning at verse 14.

First of all, we find that God places a large "spiritual poison" label on "fellowship" or partnership between righteousness and lawlessness.

Secondly, we find that God places a large "spiritual poison" label on "communion" between light and darkness. The wording in the original language has in mind the idea of spiritual fellowship, of participation in common causes with those who are still in spiritual darkness.

Thirdly, we find that God places a large "spiritual poison" label on anything that involves "accord" or agreement between those who are in Christ and those

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who are still outside of Christ, those who are under the power of Satan, no matter how religious they may be.

Fourthly, we find that God places a large "spiritual poison" label on anything that involves partnership between a believer and an unbeliever.

And finally, we find that God places a large "spiritual poison" label on anything that involves "agreement" between the temple of God and idols. And so that there will be absolutely no mistake about this, the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit plainly states in verse 16 that "you [the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ] are the temple of the living God" in the New Testament age.

Scripture tells us that the unbelieving world is given over to every kind of idolatry. And God is telling us that there can be no agreement between those who are the temples of the living God and those who are given over to idolatry. And God's Word tells us repeatedly that all sin, all rebellion against God, is inherently a matter of idolatry.

What agreement, Paul says, can there be between the temple of God and idols? And the word "agreement" has the sense of "approving of the same things." It has to do with being of the same mind about things. And Scripture makes it clear that this is impossible. First Corinthians chapter 2 verse 9 tells us that

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man [man apart from Jesus Christ] the things which God has prepared

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for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us [to believers] through His Spirit.

The unbeliever does not have the Spirit of God living within him. And in First Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 12, the Apostle Paul goes on to say this:

Now we [believers] have received, [notice] not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive [does not accept as true] the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

This is the dividing line. This is the imperative. Is separation an imperative for the individual Christian and for the church as a body? The answer is absolutely and unequivocally yes. But we live in a time when much of the church that says that it believes the Bible from cover to cover acts as though it does not believe *this section* of the Bible. Much of the church acts as though these verses were not even in the Word of God. But dear friends, here they are, as plain as the print on the page, given to us in the strongest possible terms. The imperative of separation is not merely an exhortation or a suggestion, it is a command of God. We must note well God's poison labels. We ignore them at our peril.

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A Command With a Promise

But with the command, there is a promise. God says that if you think and act and speak in a manner that is separated from the world and separated unto Me – Second Corinthians 6:17 – "I will receive you." In the original language, the meaning is that God will look upon those who live lives of separation with Divine favor. My blessing will be upon you, God says. I will have unbroken fellowship with you.

Coming out of the world means coming into closer fellowship with Me, God says. "I will receive you." The word that is translated "receive" in Second Corinthians 6:17 is a different word in the Greek from the one that we find in Colossians 3:16 where we are commanded to "let the Word of Christ dwell in" us. But the sense is very much the same – two sides of the same coin, if you will. Let the Word of Christ be welcome within the home of your heart. Let the Word of Christ have free reign within you. Let the Word of Christ empower you to live a life that is separated from the world and separated unto God. And just as the Word of Christ is welcome within your heart, you yourself will be welcome in the fellowship of God.

Here is the point, dear friend: You cannot please God, you cannot live life in full fellowship with God, unless you live a life that is separated from this present evil world and separated unto Him. Biblical separation is not an option for the believer or for the church. It is not a doctrine that we can choose to apply in some situations but not in others. We cannot decide to neglect or ignore the doctrine of separation in certain circumstances because we believe that the end will justify the means.

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Never Enter Into Evil So That "Good" May Supposedly Come

We cannot refuse God's command to be spiritually separate from unbeliever, and do so only when we think it is best. We cannot decide to make common cause with unbelievers in spiritual matters because we think it will help to ensure success. It is never pleasing to God to do evil or to enter into partnership with those who are still the slaves of Satan in order to bring about what we would consider to be a good result. That is not how God operates. We are never to think that we should do evil, that we should disobey the clear commands of God, in order that good may supposedly come.

This is the trap that so many churches and individual Christians are falling into today. Our job is to proclaim the Gospel, the one true Gospel, of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Any time that we enter into fellowship or partnership in things such as moral enterprises with those who are outside of Christ, the Gospel by definition is compromised. The watching unbelieving world becomes confused about the Gospel when it is mingled with these lesser things.

And dear friends, let us face facts: The unbelievers who want us to make common cause with them in supposedly moral endeavors are those who reject the Gospel. They do not want the Gospel to have success. And one of Satan's most clever traps for the church and for the individual Christian is to distract us from the clear, unadulterated proclamation of the Gospel by getting us involved in things that appear to be good but which are not God's best – things that are not

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within the very limited and specialized sphere of things we, and no one else, are commanded to do by our Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we know that this is true? How can we be so unequivocal about this? The answer to that question has to do with the next question we need to consider, and that question is, "What is the foundation of separation?" And this will lead us to yet a third question which is, "What is the position of separation?" In other words, what is it that definitively distinguishes the position of Biblical separation from the position of un-Biblical compromise? The Lord willing, we will take up these vital questions as we continue in our next message.

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