

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separated In Christ" (Colossians 3:1-4, 16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/13/2014

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Today we are continuing our series of messages on the doctrine of Biblical separation. The Word of God commands believers in Christ to be spiritually separated from the world and separated unto God, even as we are living life in this present evil world, as we await the upward call into the glories of eternal life with Christ.

As we begin today let me call your attention once again to the passage of Scripture that has been our theme for this series of messages. If you are able to do so, please turn with me in your own copy of God's Word to Colossians chapter 3. I want to begin reading at the beginning of the chapter to establish a point of context, and then continue at a later point in the chapter at our theme passage. So we begin at Colossians chapter 3, 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.

And then moving down to chapter 3, verse 16. Colossians chapter 3, 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

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deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

### **The Foundation, the Position**

In our last message, we asked the question: What is the foundation of separation? We found that the answer is that Scripture itself is the foundation of separation. In living a life of separation from the world and separation unto God, those who are saved, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, must stand upon Scripture alone. That is why it is called *Biblical* separation.

At the end of our last message we saw that in First John chapter 2, beginning at verse 15, we are told not to love the world or the things in the world. We are told that it is quite possible, and in fact quite natural, to have *agape* love – self-sacrificial love – for the world and the things of the world. We can sacrifice ourselves and our churches to the things of this present evil world. But we must not do that. We must not enter into that bondage once again. We have been freed from that bondage by the blood of Christ. And so we must walk in a different way because we are in a different position than we were before.

And this brings us to our next point of consideration in studying the doctrine of Biblical separation. The question is this: What is the position of separation? And just as the Word of God has answered all of our other questions concerning the imperative of separation, the Bible also clearly answers this question.

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The position of separation for those who are saved can be summed up in the fact that *we are in Christ*. And that is why, at the beginning of this message, I read not only the words of our theme passage in Colossians 3:16 to 17, where we are given the twofold key to separation, which has to do with letting the Word of God have free reign within us, and asking about everything that we do and say and think, "Is this worthy of having the name of Christ upon it?" I also read the opening verses of Colossians chapter 3, where we are told to set our minds on things above, and not on things on this earth, and in verse three we are told the reason why we are to do this: "For you died [you died to the things of this world], and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

This is where we stand. We no longer stand in the world that is under the sway of Satan. We stand in Christ. Our lives and our eternal destinies are hidden in Him. And so we must live life in this world in the light of that position.

But there is much more to be said about this glorious fact. In the time that remains today I'm going to refer you to a great many passages of Scripture that deal with this. As you are listening I doubt that you will have time to turn to them all. But perhaps you will be able to write down the references and look at them later for yourself. Or, you can also go to our website, [teachingtheword.org](http://teachingtheword.org), and you can read a transcript of this message in which all of the references will be given.

But by whatever means, I hope that you will study these things further, because

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these are vitally important propositions in the study of the doctrine of Biblical separation. So let me now place these propositional truths before you.

### **To Be "In Christ" Is To Be A Christian**

First of all, we must understand that to be "in Christ" is to be a Christian. To be a Christian is to be in Christ. The two things are inseparable. And this is why separation from the world and separation unto God is an imperative for every believer in Christ. Salvation is in Him alone. If we are truly saved, our lives will increasingly demonstrate that fact. And the way in which that fact will be demonstrated is by greater and greater separation from the things of this world and greater and greater separation unto God and the things of the life to come.

Romans chapter 3 verse 24 tells us that we are "justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that is *in Christ Jesus*."

Romans chapter 6 verse 23 tells us that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life *in Christ Jesus our Lord*."

First Corinthians chapter 1 verse 30 tells us that we who are saved "are *in Christ Jesus*, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption..."

First Corinthians chapter 15 verse 22 tells us that "as in Adam all die, even so *in Christ* all [that is, all who are saved] shall be made alive."

In First John chapter 5 verse 20, we read this: "And we know that the Son of

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God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and [notice] we are *in* Him who is true, *in* His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." (1 John 5:20)

So if you are saved, dear friend, if you are a Christian, it means that you are in Christ. You have been "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). You have been "raised with Christ" (Colossians 3:1). You have been "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

That is your position. You are no longer in the world, spiritually speaking. You are in Christ. It is in Christ that you are made alive. It is in Christ that you have been given the righteousness of God. It is in Christ that you have been given the wisdom of His Word to live a life that is worthy of Him in this present evil world.

### **"In Christ" Is Ultimate Safety and Confidence**

Let me also place before you a second proposition: To be "in Christ" is to be in the place of ultimate safety and surety, both now and for eternity. We've already seen this in Colossians chapter 3, verse three: "your life is hidden with Christ in God." You have a new spiritual life. Your life is no longer in the sphere of the things that have to do with this present evil world. Your life is the life of the risen Christ. Your life is hidden with Him in God.

And so we read the great assurance in Romans chapter 8, verses 38 and 39,  
that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers,

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nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is [notice] in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dear friend, we can have the confidence to live a life that is separated from the world and separated unto God because we are in Christ.

### **To Be "In Christ" Is For Christ To Have The Preeminence**

And here, then, is a third proposition that follows directly from the these first two: If you are truly saved, if you are truly in Christ, then Christ must have the preeminence. The preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ in all things is the great over-arching theme of the book of Colossians. The Apostle Paul addresses this epistle to those who are "in Christ" in Colossae. And in chapter 1 verse 18, the Apostle Paul declares that

He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

### **To Be "In Christ" Is To Walk Worthy of Christ**

And so it necessarily follows, proposition number four, that being "in Christ" means that we will by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit increasingly live our lives in a way that is worthy of Christ.

This is Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers, in Colossians chapter 1 verse 9:

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...that you may be filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and long-suffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

And so the Apostle Paul declares also in Romans chapter 8 verse one:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1)

And so the Apostle John writes in his first epistle in chapter 2, verse six:

He who says he abides in Him [that is, in Christ] ought himself also to walk just as He walked [while He was on this earth]. (1 John 2:6)

And so the Apostle John also writes in his first epistle in chapter 3, verse six:

Whoever abides in Him does not sin [that is, does not continually, unrepentantly sin]. Whoever sins [that is, sins in such a manner, demonstrates that he] has neither seen Him nor known Him. (1 John 3:6)

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And so the Apostle Paul also writes in Colossians chapter 2, beginning at verse six:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2:6-10)

To be "in Christ" is to be dead to sin, but alive in Him. In Romans chapter 6, at verse 11, the Apostle Paul declares:

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:11)

And we have those great words also in 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.

### **No Longer Members of the World, But Members of His Body**

And this also has to do, proposition number five, with the fact that to be "in Christ" means that we are no longer members of this world and its ways, but

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members of the body of Christ. Romans chapter 12, verse five: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

This is true not only for the local church but also for the universal church of Christ of which we are all members. In First Corinthians chapter 1, verse two, the Apostle Paul writes

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, [notice] with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord... (1 Corinthians 1:2)

To be "in Christ" is to be joined together with our fellow believers, in contrast to being joined together with the world. In his greetings in Romans chapter 16 and at the end of several of his other epistles, the Apostle Paul extends his greetings to many people individually, and in each case he refers to them as being "in Christ" with him.

To be "in Christ" is to be unmixed spiritually with the world. The Apostle Paul in Second Corinthians chapter 11 verse three warns the church against being drawn away into the world and being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

To be "in Christ," to be a member of His body, is to be striving toward a spiritual maturity that is more and more distinct from the thinking and living of the world. In Colossians 1:28, the Apostle Paul says that he preaches Christ,

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"warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect [or complete or mature] in Christ Jesus."

### **Separated Living in View of Future Glory**

And so this brings us today to one last proposition: To live a life of separation from the world and separation unto God is to live this life in view of future glory. In Ephesians chapter 1, beginning at verse 10, the Apostle Paul declares

that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He [God the Father, will] gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth — *in Him*. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will... (Ephesians 1:10-11)

And in Ephesians chapter 2, beginning at verse six, Paul declares that God has

raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [that position of spiritual separation], that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)

And so, as we have seen, the Apostle John says in First John 3:3 that "everyone who has this hope in [Christ] purifies himself, just as He is pure."

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## **What Is Your Response?**

Dear friend, in view of these things, on the authority of the Word of God let me ask you a question: Do you find this position of being "in Christ" too restrictive or too limiting? Is your first thought to say, "I can't live that way" or "My church cannot operate that way"? Is your first thought to say, "I must exercise my liberty" – "Our church must exercise its liberty"?

Dear friend, if you find these things to be too restrictive or too limiting, if you find that these things are a bondage, then I wonder if you really know what it means to be "in Christ." You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve Christ and serve the world. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 at verse 24, that if you try to do that, you will either "hate the one and love the other, or else [you] will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [or riches - the riches of this world]" (Matthew 6:24).

I fear that many individual Christians and many churches are trying to do just that. And so the fact is that when confronted with the inevitable imperative to choose between that which is in "in Christ" and that which is of the world, the world is that which attracts because people are deceived into thinking, "That is where true freedom lies" – when true liberty is the liberty to serve Christ, to truly be "in Christ."

If you are loyal to this world you will inevitably come to despise Christ. You may not say it outwardly, but that will be your position inwardly, and it will

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manifest itself in that which you do outwardly, and how you think about the issue of separation from the world and separation unto God.

This is, in fact, the position in so many individuals who call themselves Christians, and in so many churches that call themselves Evangelical or Reformed or Fundamental. They are trying to have one foot in the world and one foot in Christ. You can't do it.

That was the heart of the issue with the rich young ruler in Matthew chapter 19. Jesus confronted him with the fact that to truly follow Christ involves separation. It means a vastly different attitude toward the things of this world and the system of this world.

The rich young ruler couldn't bear that thought. He assumed that he could have both. He assumed he could serve two masters. He assumed it was a matter of adding something to what he already did. And so he went away sorrowful. He went away still in bondage to this world.

But Jesus proclaimed liberty to captives. Don't remain a slave of sin, Jesus said in John chapter 8. Don't remain a slave of this world. He said, John 8:36, "Therefore if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." The life of separation, dear friends, the life of separation from this evil world and separation unto our holy God, is the life of true freedom.

And so it is that the psalmist writes in Psalm 119, beginning at verse 41:

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Let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord — Your salvation according to Your Word. So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me [the one who reproaches me because I will not take part in the evils of this world], for I trust in Your Word....For I have hoped in Your ordinances.... And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts. (Psalm 119:41-45)

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