

REVELATION – SERMON 70

SOCIAL DISTANCING GOD’S WAY

Revelation 18:4

INTRODUCTION

- “Social distancing” is a term that a few months ago we had hardly heard of
- But now we hear it every day
- The rationale is that the spread of a contagious disease can be slowed if people keep their distance from each other
- This was the procedure given in the law of Moses for those infected with leprosy (Leviticus 13:45-46)
- These principles of spatial distancing to prevent disease can be carried over to the spiritual realm
- The people of God are to be holy, and are to be separated from polluting influences of sin
- From the very beginning of the creation, God showed us that the light must be divided from the darkness (Genesis 1:4)
- God requires his people to “put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean” (Leviticus 10:10; Ezekiel 44:23)
- It is therefore necessary for us to know what is holy and what is not, that we may discern between them
- The scripture, particularly the law, is God’s revelation to man as to what is good and what is evil

- Our text is a command specifically to God's people who will be on earth during the tribulation
- Some apply it to the nation of Israel, though she is called to flee out of *Jerusalem* (Matthew 24:15-20), not Babylon, and will be protected by God in the wilderness for the final 3½ years (Revelation 12:6,14)
- It is a call to the tribulation saints who will suffer privation, persecution and martyrdom, to remain steadfast in their allegiance to Christ, renouncing Babylon in all its forms—religious and commercial—shunning every temptation to unite with her in hopes of relieving suffering
- There are similarities to the admonitions in the book of Hebrews to the Jewish believers who, suffering persecution for their faith, were tempted to apostatise and return to Judaism (Hebrews 10:35-39)
- The Hebrews were exhorted to come out of the ceremonies and carnal worship of the earthly temple—and indeed from the world and its lusts—and to “go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Hebrews 13:13)
- Previously we have seen how Babylon is both a city and a system. As a system it is all but synonymous with *the world*
- Both the world and Babylon:
 - ✓ Are allied with Satan (John 12:31)
 - ✓ At enmity with God (James 4:4)
 - ✓ Hate Christ and his people (John 17:14)
 - ✓ Lie in wickedness (1 John 5:19)
 - ✓ Are driven by fleshly lust (1 John 2:16-17)
 - ✓ Have the spirit of pride (1 John 2:16-17)

- In this study we will consider how this divine call to “come out” is given to God’s people in all ages, including us today

I. SEPARATION IS A PRECEPT OF CHRIST

A. Another voice from heaven

1. It is not clear whether this is an angel speaking on behalf of God, or the voice of God himself
2. The command comes with the full authority of heaven
3. The sins of Babylon have reached unto heaven (v.5), and God’s judgment is imminent

B. God has been calling his people out of this world from the beginning

1. Abraham was called out of an idolatrous family (Genesis 12:1)
2. Lot was called out of Sodom prior to its destruction (Genesis 19:12)
3. Israel was called out of Egypt, escaping the plagues (Hosea 11:1)
4. Moses and the congregation were separated from Dathan and Abiram when God consumed them (Numbers 16:23-26)
5. Israel was called out of Babylon before God judged her (Isaiah 48:20; 52:11; Jeremiah 50:8; 51:6,45; Zechariah 2:7)

II. SEPARATION IS A PARTING FROM CORRUPTION

- A. God's people must be separate from false religion and false doctrine
 - 1. False teachers must be marked and avoided (Romans 16:17-18)
 - 2. They are to be withdrawn from (1 Timothy 6:3-5), shunned (2 Timothy 2:16-18) and turned away from (2 Timothy 3:5)
 - 3. Every Biblical doctrine is a ground of separation, not merely five or seven "fundamentals"
- B. God's people must be separate from the evil ways of this world in general
 - 1. We are not to be conformed to the world (Romans 12:2)
 - 2. We are not to be friends with the world (James 4:4)
 - 3. We are not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17)
- C. God calls his people to not only come *out* of the world, but to come *unto* him
 - 1. To those who come out and be separate, he promises, "I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
 - 2. Asceticism is a form of extreme self-denial, where even lawful things are forbidden (1 Timothy 4:1-4)
 - a. The ascetic Jews accused Jesus of being a glutton and winebibber (Matthew 11:19)
 - b. Asceticism says "touch not" (Colossians 2:20-23), while biblical separation says, "touch not *the unclean thing*" (2 Corinthians 6:17)

- c. Asceticism focusses on the *removing*, but biblical separation focusses on the *replacing*
- 3. The blessed man of Psalm 1 is not only separate from sinners, but is devoted to the law of God (Psalm 1:1-3)
- 4. The new believer not only forsakes the corrupt songs of the world, but is given a “new song... even praise unto our God” (Psalm 40:1-3)

III. SEPARATION IS FOR A PECULIAR COMPANY

- A. The gospel call is to all people, to forsake this world and come unto Christ (Luke 14:33; Acts 2:40)
- B. But here is a special call to God’s chosen people
 - 1. God has the right to make this claim as our Maker (Psalm 100:3)
 - 2. God has the right to make this claim as our Redeemer
 - a. The Christian is “bought with a price” and his body and spirit belongs to God (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)
 - 3. He redeemed us from all iniquity to “purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14)
 - 4. He called us “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9-12)

IV. SEPARATION PRESERVES FROM CONDEMNATION

- A. Proximity to sin will bring defilement
 - 1. Evil communications corrupt good manners (1 Corinthians 15:33)

2. It is possible to be partaker of other men's sins (1 Timothy 5:22)
3. We are to hate even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 23) and keep unspotted from the world (James 1:27)

B. To refuse to separate results in God's judgment

1. Lot, by his association with Sodom, suffered the loss of his discernment, morality, testimony and family, though he escaped with his own life
2. The child of God will be chastened of the Lord for disobedience (1 Corinthians 11:32)
3. Those who are sanctified, walking in love and obedience to Christ, "may have boldness in the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17-18)

CONCLUSION

1. Athanasius, a 4th century theologian who defended the doctrine of the deity of Christ against the heresies of Arius, was told by a friend, "The whole world is against you!"
2. He replied, "Then Athanasius is against the world!"
3. Every follower of Christ should wear with pride the appellation "AGAINST THE WORLD"
4. In warfare, "fraternising with the enemy" is a serious offence
5. God's will for us is not that we be taken out of the world, but we be kept from evil in this world (John 17:15; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10)

6. God intended for his people to be *different* from the people of this world (Exodus 11:7)
7. Though the Israelites were removed from Egypt, they retained Egypt in their hearts
8. Many profess Christ outwardly, yet inwardly they are like Demas and love this present world (2 Timothy 4:10)
9. The Jews thought they were separated unto God merely because of the outward rite of circumcision
10. Yet it is the circumcision of the *heart* that God requires (Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29; Galatians 6:15)
11. There are certain worldly things that are forbidden to the child of God
 - ✓ Activities
 - ✓ Places
 - ✓ Sights
 - ✓ Amusements
 - ✓ Music
 - ✓ Clothing
 - ✓ Speech
12. As born again Christians we must use discernment as we apply the scriptures that forbid fellowship with the world
13. Pray to God for his grace that you might be enabled to follow the example of the Saviour “who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26)