

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 1 of 13

Today we are continuing our series of messages on the Biblical doctrine of separation. What do we mean when we speak of "separation"? Well to answer that question, let me remind you once again of the passage that has been our theme Scripture for this series. We find it in the first four verses of Colossians chapter three.

If you are able to do so as you are listening, I invite you to turn with me in your own Bible to Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 1. The Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes these words:

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. (Colossians 3:1-4)

The Meaning of Separation

Here we have the meaning of separation for the Christian. You have been raised with Christ, raised to newness of life. A different way of thinking. A different way of living. A way that is focused on things above, and not on this present evil world.

The moment you become a Christian, your spiritual ties to this present evil world are broken. You are now, in Christ, to live a life that is spiritually separated from

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 2 of 13

this perishing world. So set your mind on things above, Paul says. Set your mind on pleasing Christ. Set your mind on His throne, on His authority. You died, Paul says. You have died to sin, you have died to this world. Your life is in Christ. The focus of your life is now the pursuit of holiness.

Now, this is the commandment of God. But this commandment is not without challenges. And many Christians face the greatest challenges, the greatest resistance, and often the greatest open opposition, within their own homes and their own families.

The Challenge Many Christians Face

Many Christians have unsaved relatives within our families. Many of us have unsaved loved ones even within our own homes. Many Christians face the challenge of living under the same roof with an unbelieving wife or husband, or perhaps an unbelieving father, mother, sister, or brother. And in these days of economic difficulty, in many cases Christian parents have unsaved adult children living with them.

The challenge that Christians face in such situations is simply this: How can I live the spiritually separated life that God calls upon every believer in Christ to live, in the face of constant pressures to abandon spiritually separated living, pressures to compromise a spiritually separated position, and those pressures come from people I love? How can I please God in this situation? What pleases God in this situation?

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 3 of 13

Your Challenge Is An Opportunity

Well dear friends, let me begin by saying this: You need to look on such a situation as an opportunity. If you are a Christian living in such a circumstance, God has put you in some of the most intimate human relationships with people who are in fact a mission field.

We read in the 9th chapter of Matthew, beginning at verse 35, that as Jesus went about the cities and villages of Israel while He was on earth, He was moved with compassion for the lost, "because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). And Jesus said to His disciples, "the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray [to] the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (9:37).

If you are a Christian living under the same roof with unsaved loved ones, or if you are living within a family in which there are unsaved loved ones, the Lord has placed you in the harvest field. I encourage you to pray that the Lord would use you, would use your separated life and witness, to bring in a harvest of souls, even within your own household or family. God is able to do that.

God's Word Is Your Great Resource

And let me also remind you that the Word of God is your great resource in these situations. Scripture tells us what kind of a witness you are to have before your unsaved loved ones. Scripture tells us how we are to do it. Let me remind you of the

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 4 of 13

truths that we have seen thus far as we have considered this question.

First of all, the Lord Jesus Himself taught on this subject. In an earlier message we looked in particular at Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 10. Jesus tells us that the principal thing you must do is to confess Him before the unbelievers in your household or family. Confess Christ before them.

Let me remind you again what it means to confess Christ. The significance of the words in the original language is that you must be in complete agreement with Christ and His Word in your thinking, your speaking, and your conduct before your unsaved loved ones.

Secondly, we have seen that we must resist the temptation to deny Christ in such circumstances. To deny Christ is to compromise with unbelievers. To deny Christ is to be out of agreement with Christ in your thinking, your speaking, or your conduct before your unsaved loved ones. And if you deny Christ before them, there will be serious spiritual consequences for you as well as for them.

Thirdly, we also saw that confessing Christ before the unbelievers in your own household will inevitably produce conflict. Let me remind you once again of the words of the great 19th century preacher J. C. Ryle, who said this:

We are not to think it strange if the Gospel...causes estrangement between the nearest relations. It is sure to do so in many cases, because of the deep corruption of man's heart. As long as one man believes, and

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 5 of 13

another remains unbelieving, so long as one is resolved to keep his sins, and another is desirous to give them up, the result of the preaching of the Gospel must needs be division. For this the Gospel is not to blame, but the heart of man.

Love Is To Be Your Motivation

And this brings us to a fourth point: As we have seen many times in this series, the keynote of Biblical separation is self-sacrificial love. *Agape* love. But that love is, first of all self-sacrificial love toward Christ because of Christ's self-sacrificial love for you. He gave Himself for you, out of a heart of unfathomable love.

"We love Him," First John 4:19 tells us, "because He first loved us." It is your love toward Christ that must govern your love toward the unbelievers in your household. Let me remind you that in Matthew chapter 10, Jesus declared that a love for father, or mother, or son, or daughter that does not put Christ first is not worthy of Him. Jesus does not tell us not to love our unsaved family members. Quite the contrary. But Jesus tells us that our love for unsaved family members – and indeed, our love for our believing family members as well – must be a love that puts Christ first.

Further Instruction Given to the Corinthians

And let me remind you of a fifth point we saw in previous messages: Christ offers hope even in seemingly hopeless circumstances within a home. And this

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 6 of 13

point brought us to the passage that we have been considering together in First Corinthians chapter 7, where we find further instruction on this vital issue, further instruction from the Holy Spirit that builds upon the foundation that Christ laid for us in the Gospels.

And so, if you are able to do so as you are listening, please turn with me in your own Bible to the book of First Corinthians, chapter 7, beginning at verse 10. First Corinthians chapter 7, beginning at verse 10. The Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes these words to those who are facing the challenge of living day to day under the same roof with unbelieving loved ones. First Corinthians chapter 7, beginning at verse 10:

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 7 of 13

not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?
Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? But
as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let
him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Let me remind you of the things that we have seen thus far in this passage of
Scripture.

First of all, we have seen that the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy
Spirit is building upon Jesus' teaching regarding marriage and divorce in the
Gospel records. And we've seen that Paul is reminding us of two principles here.
The first principle is that spiritual separation does not normally mean leaving the
unsaved loved ones who are under your roof, or divorcing yourself from them.

Now as we have said before, there are situations in which physical separation is
wise and proper. For example, if your life is in danger, or the lives of your
children are in danger, because of the violence of an unbelieving spouse. You are
not compelled to remain. We are going focus on this point, the Lord willing, in a
future message.

Secondly, we have seen that if you find yourself living under the same roof
with unbelievers, or in close relationships with unbelieving family members, it is
God's plan that has placed you in that circumstance. And thirdly, we have seen

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 8 of 13

that it is God's will for Christians who are living in such circumstances to bear witness for Christ.

God Knows Your Situation

Now perhaps you are thinking, Well, that's easy for you to say. But you don't know my situation. You don't know my unsaved relatives. You don't know the unsaved man I'm married to. You don't know the unsaved woman I'm married to. You don't know the unsaved child I'm dealing with.

Well dear friend, of course I don't know those things. But God does. He knows your circumstances exactly. He knows your loved ones intimately. He knows more about them than even you do.

And let me tell you about the city of Corinth. The Christians to whom Paul was writing these words were living in the New York City of their day. Corinth was a major political center. It was a major commercial center. It was a major center of pagan culture. Corinth was also a center of the worst kinds of pagan worship. Corinth was a seaport, and just like seaports today, there was great immorality in Corinth, immorality of all kinds. In other words, Corinth was a major center of everything that would be an incredibly strong and ungodly influence on a household in which believers are living together with unbelievers.

Paul wrote these words about living under the same roof with unsaved family members to people who were living in some of the most difficult circumstances a

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 9 of 13

Christian can face. And what does he say to them? Don't leave Corinth. Don't leave your homes. Don't abandon your unsaved loved ones. Live the life that Christ has called you to live. Live the life of a spiritually separated Christian before these people.

Dear friend, do you think that you are facing some challenge that is greater than these Corinthians faced? Do you think that you are facing some challenge that is greater than God? Greater than the power of His Word? Greater than the power of His Spirit who lives within you? First Corinthians 10:13 tells us that

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

And Hebrews chapter 4 tells us that in our Lord Jesus Christ

we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

And let me also remind you that God's Word never gives us a principle or a command that is not practical. God has given us His Word in order for us to live according to His Word. There is no situation in life, no matter how difficult, no

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 10 of 13

matter how filled with questions, that is not governed by the authority of the Word of God.

What Scripture Does Not Give Us

And dear friends, when we are facing questions like these, often the most important thing for us to understand first of all is what Scripture does not tell us.

Perhaps the most important thing for you to understand is that Scripture does not give you a detailed list of Do's and Don'ts to employ in such circumstances. Now when I say that, I want you to be certain that I am not telling you that Scripture permits us to employ situation ethics. No. God's Word is unchangeable. God's Word does not bend and stretch in the ways that sinful human beings often try to bend and stretch it to justify their sins.

In Psalm 111 verses 7 and 8 we read that all of God's commandments "are sure" – that is, they are firmly established – "they stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness" – it could be more literally said, they produce truth and uprightness.

Also, dear friends, the Word of God does not give us detailed lists of Do's and Don'ts because every case in which a believer is living is unique. No two are precisely the same. But God's Word is comprehensive enough to apply to them all. And we must be careful, especially in a matter such as this, to understand that the Spirit of God is doing a great unseen work. Jesus said that His Spirit, present in this

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 11 of 13

world, present in you, is the One who "convicts the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). We must not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We must not throw the cold water of legalism on the fire of the Holy Spirit.

And so, dear friends, I myself as a minister of the Word must refrain from giving you lists of extra-Biblical Do's and Don'ts, lest I myself become guilty of quenching the work that the Spirit may wish to do in your particular situation.

Employ Your Mind, Seek the Spirit's Guidance

Please remember this: God has given you a mind with which to think. God does not expect you to turn off your mind when you become a Christian. God expects you to look into His Word, to learn and to understand the principles and the commandments that we find there. And then – relying upon the Holy Spirit living within you, the Holy Spirit working within the situation in which you find yourself – God expects you to apply those principles and commandments to the circumstances in which God, by His sovereign direction, has placed you.

God's Word is truth for all of time and eternity. God's Word is truth for all the circumstances of life in this world. And the truly amazing thing is that God has not only given us His inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word which is timeless and changeless and universal – but He has also given us the Divine Author of all Scripture, the Third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, living within us to guide our thoughts and order our steps.

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 12 of 13

In John chapter 16 verse 13, Jesus declared to His disciples, that when the indwelling Spirit would come, "He will guide you into all truth." The Greek could also accurately be rendered as saying that the Holy Spirit will "give guidance" to the Christian "in all aspects of the truth." In other words, God has given us His Holy Spirit so that He may apply the truth of His Word to the situations we face in our daily lives. There can be no more practical help for the Christian than the guidance of the Spirit of God living within you.

Dear friend, spend time in the Word of God. Spend time in prayer. Ask God to guide you in the truth of His Word, to help you understand how to apply His Word to your specific situations, challenges, and problems in living with unbelievers in your own household or your own family. "He will guide you into all truth." This is the sure promise of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. God the Holy Spirit will do it.

You Need Not Fear

Are you fearful about this? Well dear friend, you need not fear. The way to the throne of Heaven is open to you. Seek those things which are above, where Christ is. Go to Him with your problems and your fears. I believe I can do nothing better today than to close with the inspired words of the Apostle Paul that we find in the book of Philippians, in chapter 4, beginning at verse 6:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Hope In Your Home" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/27/2015

Page 13 of 13

of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things... these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to obey Christ's Great Commission: preaching the Gospel to all, and equipping believers in Christ to live every area of life by the sole authority of Scripture, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

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