

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Commitment At Home" (Colossians 3:1-4, 1 Corinthians 7:10-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/5/2015

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Today we are continuing our series of messages on one of the most neglected subjects in the church today, the doctrine of Biblical separation. At present we are focusing in particular on the Bible's instruction to Christians who are living in a home or a family situation with unbelievers.

As we begin today, I hope that you will turn with me once again if you are able to our theme passage for this series, which is found in Colossians chapter 3 beginning at verse 1. The Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes these words:

If then [or it can also accurately be stated, since 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.

Now let me also call your attention to the particular passage regarding the doctrine of separation that we are dealing with at the present time. Those words are found in the book of First Corinthians, in chapter 7, beginning at verse 10. And so I invite you to turn there with me as well, to First Corinthians chapter 7, beginning at verse 10. Here the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is speaking to believers in the church at Corinth who were living with a husband, or a wife, or children, who were not believers. Listen to the instruction that he

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gives. 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 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.

How To Think, How To Live

If you are a regular listener to these broadcasts, you will know that many times I speak of the fact that even though the Bible contains 66 different books, written

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by many different men over a period of thousands of years, the Bible is still one Book, because it was written by one Divine Author, God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is of one mind and never changes.

Because that is true, the two passages of Scripture that we have just read are part of an interconnected whole. In Colossians chapter 3, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul is telling us *how we are to think* as Christians because of our position in Christ. In First Corinthians chapter 7, the Holy Spirit through Paul is telling a Christian *how you are to conduct yourself* in one of life's most difficult situations.

Many Christians have unsaved relatives within our families. Many of us have unsaved loved ones even within our own homes – an unbelieving wife or husband, or perhaps an unbelieving father, mother, sister, or brother. Or, perhaps, unbelieving children. The question we are dealing with at the present time revolves around a central question of the Christian life: How can I live the spiritually separated life that God calls upon me to live in the face of constant pressures to abandon that life – pressures that come from some of the people I love most dearly in this world?

Encouraging Truth

As we have begun to examine the words that we find in First Corinthians chapter 7, we have found great encouragement here. We have seen that for the

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Christian, such a situation is an opportunity to bear witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have seen that the Word of God is the Christian's great resource in such situations. We have seen that God the Holy Spirit illuminates His Word for us. He is the great and infallible Guide of the believer in such situations.

And we have seen that God uses the Holy Spirit, who has come into this world, indwelling the saints of God, to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. As the temples of the living God, we are God's instrument for the accomplishment of that great cosmic purpose in this present world.

We have also seen that our attitude in such situations must be grounded in love – the same kind of self sacrificial love that Christ has demonstrated for us, in that while we were yet sinners, He died for us.

We have also seen that no situation is too hard for the Lord. No situation is beyond His control. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that if you are in such a challenging situation, living in the most intimate of circumstances with unbelievers, that is a situation in which God has sovereignly placed you. It is His plan. He has done it for His glory, and – even though it may not seem so to our human eyes – He has done it for your good, both now and for the life to come.

With these things in mind, let me call your attention to additional instruction that we find here in First Corinthians chapter 7.

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Unconditional Teaching Concerning Marriage and Divorce

First of all, in verses 10 and 11 we find the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul restating the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel records concerning divorce and remarriage. Notice these verses once again:

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.

These are unconditional statements. God's Word tells us that He hates divorce. In Matthew chapter 19 beginning at verse 3 we read that

The Pharisees...came to [Jesus], testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" And [Jesus] answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So, then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let not man separate."

[Then the Pharisees] said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" [Jesus] said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you,

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whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality [and in the original language this refers to sexual immorality prior to marriage], and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

Conditional Teaching Concerning Marriage to an Unbeliever

Now on this unequivocal and unconditional foundation, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul gives further instruction in First Corinthians 7 beginning at verse 12. But notice that this instruction is conditional. Notice how the Apostle Paul begins:

If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and [if] 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.

Notice the use of the word "if" in these verses. There is a condition upon the instruction that the Holy Spirit now gives through the Apostle Paul. That condition is the consent of an unbelieving spouse to remain in the marriage relationship. Notice that carefully. This passage speaks of a consent that is to be given by the unbeliever. It is the unbeliever who is to make the decision whether to stay or to leave. It is not to be a question with the believer. The Christian spouse in this situation is not to think about leaving, except in extenuating circumstances.

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Now what are those extenuating circumstances? Let me submit to you, based on the original language of this passage, that those extenuating circumstances are limited ones, and they have to do with the attitude and the behavior of the unbelieving spouse. They have to do with the willingness of the unbelieving spouse to live with the believer – not only physically living together under the same roof, but also the state of mind that is involved. Is the unbeliever not only willing to live under the same roof, but to make a home of it?

Let me ask the question from the opposite direction: What would indicate that the unbelieving spouse is not truly committed to making a home? In our last message I mentioned one such circumstance, and that is the situation in which the unbeliever within the relationship is violently abusive to the extent that the unbelieving husband or wife or children may be in danger for their lives.

It is a wise and sensible thing for the believing spouse not to remain under the same roof with an unbelieving spouse in such a dangerous situation. It is a wise and sensible thing also for the sake of the children who are in danger of such harm.

When I was growing up, there was a very fine Christian lady in my home church who was living with an unbelieving spouse. But he was a violent man. He had heard the Gospel. Our pastor, and the man's wife, and other people had witnessed to the man. But he was violently opposed to Christ and to the Gospel. And because of this, he had threatened to kill his wife on a number of occasions.

Our pastor, and others in our church, rightly advised this lady not to remain

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under the same roof with the man. She was in real danger. But she chose to remain. And one night her unbelieving husband did kill her. She died a horrible death. And then her husband took his own life. Dear friends, the Scripture that we are considering together does not require a believer to remain under the same roof with an unbeliever in such a circumstance.

I believe that the original language of this passage also encompasses a situation in which the unbelieving spouse is unwilling to remain committed exclusively to the "one flesh" relationship of which Jesus spoke in Matthew chapter 19. In other words, the case of an unbelieving spouse who persists in adultery.

But let me also say, dear friends, that I have known Christian spouses who have chosen to remain under the same roof even with an unrepentant adulterer. Even when there was ongoing adultery. And this is one of the reasons why I said, in our last message, that you need to seek the guidance of God the Holy Spirit in such a situation.

The Holy Spirit Instructs the Mind

You need to be careful not to try to construct legalistic lists of do's and don'ts that Scripture does not give. And as I said, this is not a matter of giving into the false notion of situation ethics. God's Word is unchangeable and unchanging. We cannot bend and stretch it to justify sin. Psalm 111 tells us that God's Word produces truth and uprightness. And God's Word does that in all kinds of situations. God's Word is comprehensive enough to cover everything.

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God does not expect you to stop thinking when you become a Christian. God expects you to immerse yourself in the instruction that is to be found in His Word, to learn and to understand the principles and the commandments that you find there. And then, God expects you to rely upon the Holy Spirit who lives within you. According to God's sure promise, the Holy Spirit will work within the situation in which you find yourself, to help you apply the principles and commandments of Scripture to the circumstances in which God has placed you.

And dear friends, that is one of the reasons why I am proceeding carefully and deliberately in presenting these things to you from the Word of God. We cannot gloss over these things.

The Believer's Sanctifying Influence

Let me call your attention to the reason why the believing spouse is to remain in the household if the unbelieving husband or wife is also willing to remain – and by this, in the context, we mean to truly remain committed to the family relationship. We find that reason given to us in verse 14 of First Corinthians chapter 7. Notice once again what the Holy Spirit tells us through the Apostle Paul:

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.

The presence of the believer, living under the same roof with an unbelieving

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spouse, has a sanctifying effect on the unbelieving spouse. We also see that there is a similar effect regarding the children in the household. And I believe that it is reasonable to say that there is this kind of sanctifying effect in any case in which a Christian is in close contact with unbelievers in a family situation, living a spiritually separated life before them.

This is the reason that the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul gives us for a believer remaining under the same roof, and remaining in close family relationships with unbelieving relatives. Notice the word "for" at the beginning of verse 14. As I have said to you many times in these messages, the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit presents the instruction that the Spirit gives through him in a very logical manner. Here we see an example of that logic.

In verses 12 and 13 he uses the logical connective "if" to set the condition that pertains to the teaching he is giving there. And then at the beginning of verse 14 he uses the logical connective "for" to state the reason for the teaching that is given in verses 12 and 13. If the unbelieving spouse is willing to remain in the marriage relationship, the Christian in the relationship is not to depart, not to divorce a spouse. Why? Because, verse 14, of the sanctifying influence of the believer upon the unbeliever.

What do I mean by a sanctifying influence? In the original language, the word that is translated "sanctified" in these verses means to be "set apart." What is significant about that? To understand that significance we need to keep in mind

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why the Apostle Paul was dealing with this entire issue in the first place.

The Issue At Corinth

He was dealing with a church at Corinth in which there were many spiritually mixed families and households. And he was dealing with this issue at a time when the Corinthian believers would have been using mainly the Old Testament, and perhaps any limited portions of the New Testament that might have been available at the time, as their authority for faith and life. That is the authority to which the Apostle Paul would have been pointing them.

And so, the question would naturally arise: We Corinthian believers are in a situation that is similar to that which we find among the remnant of Jewish believers who returned to the land of Israel as recorded in the book of Ezra. Many of them were in spiritually mixed marriages. Many of them had married spouses who were not believers. Many of them had children who were the products of these spiritually mixed marriages. And in Ezra chapter 10, the Corinthians would have found that the Israelites who returned to the land divorced their pagan spouses and separated themselves from their mixed-marriage children. The question would have been, Are we to do the same thing?

Here in First Corinthians chapter 7, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul is instructing them not to do so. He is telling them that under the New Covenant believers are to remain with unbelieving spouses. He is telling them that both the unbelieving spouse and the children of the mixed marriage are in a special set-

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apart relationship in the eyes of God.

It is especially significant, in this connection, that the Holy Spirit says through Paul in verse 14 that the Corinthian believers' children are not "unclean." Here he uses a Greek word that is the equivalent of the Hebrew word that described such children under the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, these children of such spiritually mixed marriages were considered to be "unclean" – they were not considered to be legitimate.

The Holy Spirit through Paul is saying that "otherwise" – that is, under the Old Covenant – "your children would be unclean, but now" – under the New Covenant – they are not. "They are holy," Paul says. Literally, he is saying that they are set apart in a special way.

Now once again, we need to consider the entire Word of God on this subject. And as we consider the context here in First Corinthians, as well as the Old Testament teaching on the same subject, and also the Greek language and syntax of the text here in First Corinthians, we must conclude that the set-apart status of the children would have to do with one of two things.

First, it could refer to the legitimacy of the children within what the Holy Spirit through Paul declares to be a legitimate marriage under the New Covenant, whereas, in contrast, under the Old Covenant both the spiritually mixed marriage and the children of that marriage would have been considered ceremonially and legally illegitimate.

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Secondly, the language that we have here could refer to the privileges of the influence of the Word of God and of the Gospel by the presence of the Holy Spirit within the home upon the unbelieving spouse, and upon the children of such a marriage. I believe that as we look at the context it is accurate to say that both things are in view in the teaching that we have before us.

Now there is much more that we need to say about this, but our time for today is running out. And so, the Lord willing, we are going to explore these matters further in our next message. And we are going to see, I believe, some glorious truth – truth in which there is great encouragement and great power for the Christian to live a spiritually separated life before unbelievers in the most intimate of relationships. And so, I encourage you to join us again next time for that message.

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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