

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 1 of 13

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As we continue our study of ten propositions from the Word of God concerning the doctrine of spiritual separation, let me remind you once again of the commands of God concerning this vital matter that we find in Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 16. Once again today I encourage you to open your Bible with me if you are able, because we are going to be looking not only at this passage but also at several others during the course of this message. And so we begin, first of all, in Colossians chapter 3, verses 16 and 17:

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.

### **Two Kinds of Error Regarding Separation**

As I have said in previous messages, we are considering truths that are clearly stated throughout the Word of God, but they are very seldom taught in the church today. The doctrine of spiritual separation, Biblical separation, is rarely taught in the church today, and because that is true it is rarely lived out in the church today. And in many cases, we find a counterfeit of true Biblical separation being taught and practiced in some parts of the Christian church today.

And so we actually have two different kinds of error regarding the doctrine of

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Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

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Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 2 of 13

---

separation within the visible church today. On the one hand, many in the church are erring in the direction of not teaching or practicing Biblical separation at all. And in doing so, many times they are in fact advocating a false doctrine that I spoke of in our last message, and that is the false proposition that there is such a thing as a "carnal Christian."

The Word of God gives no place to such a doctrine. The individual who is truly regenerated by the Spirit of God will demonstrate that regeneration by endeavoring to live a life that is more and more separated from this present evil world and more and more separated toward the Lord Jesus Christ and the things of the world to come.

So on the one hand, we have those who are in error concerning the doctrine of separation because they wrongly admit the idea or the possibility of a so-called "carnal Christian." On the other hand, some in the church today are taking a position that they believe is Biblical separation, but in fact it is not what Scripture defines as genuine separation from the world and separation unto God. Often, it is in fact a very arbitrary and man-centered way of looking at the issue. Often it manifests itself in terms of the kind of sectarianism, the kinds of divisions within the true Church of Jesus Christ, that the New Testament Scriptures in particular so frequently condemn.

And so we must be very careful to measure everything, all teachings, all opinions, by the infallible standard of the Word of God. And that is what we are

---

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Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 3 of 13

---

endeavoring to do in this series of messages as we now examine ten propositions that relate to the doctrine of separation as the Scriptures in fact present it to us.

### **Conversion Demands Separation**

In our last message, we took up the first three of those ten propositions.

We saw, first of all, that we who are now Christians were once aliens from God. That was our position by birth as sinners who are under the condemnation of our father Adam. We were, as the Apostle Paul writes earlier in Colossians in chapter 1, verse 21, "once alienated and enemies in [our minds] by wicked works." That is the position of every individual who ever lives in this world who is unsaved. We are separated from God. We are separated from Jesus Christ. We are separated from the kingdom of God.

Secondly, we saw that those who have been converted, those who have become Christians by the work of the Spirit of God who applies the atoning work of Jesus Christ, those who have been saved, are now aliens in this present world. Our position has completely changed. It has been completely reversed. As the Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians chapter 1, we who were once alienated from God, Jesus Christ "has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight..." We have been raised up and made to "sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" – Ephesians chapter 2, verse 6.

---

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Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 4 of 13

---

And then the third proposition that we saw in the Word of God is that Christians have been made aliens in this present world for an eternal purpose. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10 tells us that "we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand [that is, before the foundation of the world] that we should walk in them" – literally that those things should be our occupation and our way of conducting ourselves in this present evil world as we make our way toward the glory.

And we saw that because these three things are true – that we who were once aliens from God are now because of conversion aliens in this world, but aliens for a cosmic purpose – because these things are true for the Christian, spiritual separation is not an option. It is an essential. It is commanded. Your position in Christ demands it. And the position of the true Church of Jesus Christ as the body of Christ demands it of the Church as a body as well.

Now this brought us very logically to a vital question: How does God accomplish this? How does God bring about spiritually separated thinking and living in the individual Christian and in the Church of Jesus Christ as His body? That is the issue that we are now going to take up as we address the next propositions that we find in the Word of God, propositions numbers four and number five concerning the doctrine of separation.

Proposition number four is this: Jesus Christ, the God-man, was an alien while He was in this world in a human body. It is essential for every Christian to get

---

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Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 5 of 13

---

hold and to keep hold of that fact.

I want to put before you four passages of Scripture among the many that we find in the Word of God that speak of this fact.

### **The One From Above**

Let me call your attention first of all to John the Baptist's own testimony that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that He declared to be the One who would take away the sins of the world – John the Baptist himself declared that Jesus was an alien when He was in this present world. John chapter 3, verse 31. John the Baptist declared this about the Lord Jesus Christ:

He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from Heaven is above all.

Let me next call your attention to Jesus' own statement to the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders in John chapter 8, verse 23. John chapter 8, verse 23:

And He [Jesus] said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."

This, Jesus said, is why you, the unbelieving religious leaders of the nation of Israel, cannot understand what I am saying to you. And because you do not understand, because you do not believe, Jesus said, therefore "you will die in your sins" (verse 24).

---

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 6 of 13

---

## **Christ & His People – Both "Not Of This World"**

And then let me also call your attention to the high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus in John chapter 17. John chapter 17, beginning at verse 9. The Lord Jesus is praying here for His disciples and for all believers who would follow after them down through the centuries. In fact, here in John chapter 17, the Lord Jesus was praying for you and for me.

And notice, as I read this prayer of our Lord Jesus, how many times He makes the point that both He and the true believer in Him are not of this present evil world. Notice these repeated statements. John chapter 17, beginning at verse 9. Jesus said this to the Father in Heaven:

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You.

Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and to these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 7 of 13

---

I have given them Your Word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

It is vitally important for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to understand our true position in Christ. It is imperative for us to understand that we are not of this world just as He was not of this world. Now, what did it mean for Jesus to be "not of this world"? I hope that you will listen to me carefully: There is more to this than the fact that Jesus was God who had come down from Heaven and taken on a body of human flesh. As momentous and cosmically important as that fact is, there is even more that we need to understand.

### **Christ – "Separate From Sinners"**

We have this explained to us in the fourth passage that I want to call your attention, which is found in the book of Hebrews, chapter 7, verse 26. Here the Holy Spirit through the inspired writer speaks to us of the life that Jesus lived while He was on this earth which qualified Him to be our High Priest forever in Heaven. Hebrews chapter 7, verse 26:

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 8 of 13

---

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens...

In this passage, the writer to the Hebrews is setting forth the qualifications of the Lord Jesus Christ to serve as our High Priest at the mercy seat in Heaven. The writer is, of course, making the distinction between Jesus as a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, and the priests of the Levitical line who were all sinners who needed to make sacrifices for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people.

But notice what the writer says about the Lord Jesus Christ in this passage. He piles the adjectives one on top of another to show us the essential nature of our Savior in His humanity. Let me read the words for you once again, Hebrews chapter 7, verse 26:

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens...

"Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." The writer declares that Jesus Christ is, first of all, "holy." The word in the original language speaks of being religiously right and holy, as opposed to that which is unrighteous or polluted. Next the writer speaks of the Lord Jesus as "harmless." This word in the original language signifies that our Lord was void of evil, empty of evil.

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Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 9 of 13

---

And then the writer says further that He is "undefiled." The word in the original language has to do with being free from contamination. And then finally, the writer to the Hebrews declares that our Lord Jesus is "separate from sinners." This phrase in the original language literally means to be divided asunder from those who practice sin.

### **Christ Is Not The Example for the Unbeliever**

There is something very crucial that we must understand about the Lord Jesus Christ in order to properly understand the Biblical doctrine of separation. Let me state it first in a negative way, and then as we continue I will also state it in a positive way.

You will hear many people who are not believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, who are not saved, say that Jesus is their great example. Some of them will say, for example, that their religion is to practice the Sermon on the Mount. And of course by this they mean that they are endeavoring to follow the Beatitudes that we find in Matthew chapter 5.

But what do these unsaved people who say that Jesus is their great example really mean? What are they really saying? They are saying that they are following after, as they would see it, an example of works righteousness that will help them to earn their way into Heaven. What they do not recognize is that when they say that their religion is to practice the Sermon on the Mount, they are

---

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 10 of 13

---

selecting out a few verses from a long sermon of our Lord Jesus that extends over several chapters.

The Sermon on the Mount begins at Matthew chapter 5 verse 1 with the Beatitudes. But most unbelievers, and even many people who profess Christ today, do not understand that the Sermon on the Mount continues all the way through the end of Matthew chapter 7. It takes up three entire chapters.

And the Lord Jesus deals with many things in that great sermon. He not only sets forth the Beatitudes, He also proclaims in Matthew 5:17 that He came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. And then He speaks of the supernatural and eternal nature of the Word of God. He holds forth this infinitely high standard.

### **Not a Matter of Mere Externals**

And He proclaims the fact that keeping the law, doing those things which in fact involve being separated from this present evil world and separated unto God, these things are not a matter of mere externals. They are matters of the heart.

Beginning in Matthew 5:21, Jesus says that, yes, the Law says you shall not murder. But, Jesus says, if you have been angry with your brother without a cause, it is the same as murder in the eyes of God. And yes, Jesus says, the Law declares that you shall not commit adultery. But if a man has even lusted against a woman in his heart, you have in fact in the eyes of God committed adultery.

---

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 11 of 13

---

What is Jesus teaching? He is declaring the fact that the standard of the righteous demands of God is infinitely high, and impossible for sinful man. And righteousness, sanctification, separation from the world, is not a matter of mere externals. It is not a matter merely of appearances. It is a matter of the heart. It is a matter of separation from the world and its sinfulness, and separation unto God and His righteousness. It is a matter of love for the Lord and the things of the Lord, "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

Later on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of the fact that the way to eternal life is a narrow way, an uncompromising way, and that few go in by that way, and that the way to destruction is a broad way, a compromising way, and that there are many who are on that road.

### **Separation Impossible for the Unbeliever**

Spiritual separation is a recurring theme in the Sermon on the Mount. That which Christ is setting forth is not an example for the unbeliever. It is the condemnation of the unbeliever. None of these things will save you. These are things that the unbeliever cannot do, does not know how to do, is not equipped to do, does not have the power to do, because the unbeliever lacks the one thing that is absolutely necessary for these things to be a reality in the life – and that is regeneration by the Holy Spirit producing repentance from sin and faith toward Jesus Christ alone.

Jesus Christ is not an example of good works for the unbeliever. The unbeliever does not even understand the purpose of good works in the kingdom

---

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 12 of 13

---

of God, because the unbeliever is not a member of the kingdom of God. This is why you will find so many corrupted churches today where the Gospel message has been replaced by motivational talks promoting self-help and self-improvement. So many churches today are confusing both the saved and the unsaved – especially the unsaved who make up more and more of the typical congregation of a nominally Evangelical church today.

This is why the unsaved make up an ever higher percentage of the typical congregation today. The church is setting forth Jesus as a moral example, as a success example, as a so-called "life mentor" or "life coach" – they are setting Him forth as everything except the one thing He must be for the lost sinner – the one and only Savior from sin and from the eternal wrath of a holy God.

Yes, for the unbeliever Jesus Christ is an example – but in an entirely different way than the unbeliever thinks. Jesus Christ is the example of absolute holiness. He himself shines the blinding light of God's truth on the lost and condemned position of the unbeliever. As Jesus himself tells us in John chapter 3, the unbeliever will not come to that light, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, because his deeds are evil – even the self-righteous deeds that he supposedly does in the imitation of Christ.

### **Christ the Example of Separation for the Believer**

That is the negative side of the picture, and that is all that time permits us to consider today. But in our next message I want to put before you the positive

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Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Who Can Be Separated?" (Colossians 3:16-17, Matthew 5-7, Hebrews 7:26)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/17/2014

Page 13 of 13

---

side of this same picture. Jesus Christ is an example of good works, an example of separation from the world and separation unto God, for the individual who is already a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

How is it that Jesus walked and lived among sinful men, but still, as Hebrews tells us, remained absolutely separate from sinners? That is the question we are going to take up, the Lord willing, in our next message.

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