

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "True Christian Liberty" (Colossians 3:16-17, James 4:4-10)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/6/2014

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Let me call your attention once again to the passage of Scripture that has been our theme for this series of messages. It is found in the book of Colossians, in chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. I hope that if you are able you will turn to that passage with me as we begin today, Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 16. Let us hear the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God:

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.

Asking Questions of the Scriptures

At the present time we are focusing our attention on the Biblical doctrine of separation. We have been asking questions of the Word of God about this doctrine. Asking questions of Scripture is always a good thing for us to do. We should be constantly asking what the words of Scripture truly mean. We should be constantly comparing Scripture with Scripture in order to find the answers. We should be constantly seeking the illumination of the Author of the Book, God the Holy Spirit, as we seek those answers.

And so that is what we have been doing. We have also been comparing what Scripture says with the situation of the church as we find it in our time. And I also trust that if you have been following this series of messages that you have been

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comparing what Scripture says to the condition of your own mind and your own life before God. And I hope that this will be our focus today as we continue to look into these very vital matters for the Christian and the church.

Review

As we have been asking questions of Scripture, and as we have been looking at the condition of the church, we have seen *why we need to study this subject*. The nominally Evangelical church today is in a very sad condition, we might say a very delinquent condition, when it comes to obedience to God's command to be separated from the world and separated unto Him.

We have also seen that *Scripture defines separation*. The Word of God commands believers to walk in holiness before the Lord, the church, and the world. Believers individually and the church corporately are separated positionally, and we are to live and think and act accordingly. We have been called out of the world and placed in Christ. And so we must think and act in a manner that is consistent with that standing, in every area of life and ministry.

We have also seen that *God Himself is both the reason for separation and the standard of separation*. We are to be holy, Scripture tells us, because He is holy. The holy God of the universe is dwelling within each and every one of us who are believers in Christ. The Third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, lives within us. We are, Scripture tells us, the temples of the living God in this present age.

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We have also seen that *the standard of separation is all-encompassing*. We are told in First Peter chapter 1 that we are to live separated lives "in all manner of conduct." In everything.

We have seen that Christianity is, in fact, not a function of any of the cultures of this present world which is under the sway of Satan. *Christianity is the culture of the world to come*. It is the culture of the new world of which we as Christians are now citizens, even as we await the culmination of our redemption in Christ, when we shall be glorified with Him in the New Heavens and New Earth.

And finally, in our last message, we saw that separation as Scripture defines it is not merely an exhortation or a suggestion for the Christian as an individual or for the church as a body. *Separation is an imperative*. It is a command. And it is a command with a promise – God promises His blessing on those who separate themselves from the things of the world, and separate themselves unto Him.

The Foundation of Separation

And so today, as we continue to ask questions of the Word of God, we come now to our next question: We have seen that Scripture is so clear on all of these points about the doctrine of separation, and so we must ask the question, "What is the foundation of separation?"

And we find that the answer to this question is that Scripture itself is the foundation of separation. Scripture itself is that which undergirds and reinforces the

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things that we have been speaking of.

And so it may seem that this is something far too obvious for us to further consider. We may say, of course Scripture is the foundation of separation. And we have indeed referred to it repeatedly as Biblical separation.

The Danger of Legalism

But the reason that we need to spend additional time focusing on this point is the fact that it is possible to enter into what we may well call un-Biblical separation. It is quite possible for the Christian as an individual or for a church as a visible body to enter into something that it may call separation which is not separation at all.

It may be legalism. Often, individuals and churches formulate lists of do's and don'ts that they define as separation, but which have no clear basis in the Word of God. I have known churches in which the leadership placed the people in a legalistic bondage that is contrary to Scripture. I have seen both church leaders and individuals establish these kinds of un-Biblical standards, and then judge individuals and churches according to those invalid standards.

And often the inevitable result is that they go so far as to not only limit fellowship with other Christians based on these invalid standards, but they often even condemn other people who are truly Christians and they say that such people cannot truly be Christians. But the vast majority of the time, the things that these people are condemning other Christians for are in the category of what Romans chapter 14 verse

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one calls "doubtful things" – things in which Scripture allows for individual judgments among believers, but always under the authority of Scripture and always under the authority of Christ.

The rule that we are given in Romans chapter 14 is that Christians are not to judge one another in these things. And as the Apostle Paul continues to discuss that issue in the rest of Romans chapter 14 and in the beginning of chapter 15, the thing that the Holy Spirit emphasizes through Paul is the commandment that one Christian should not offend another. A stronger brother should not offend a weaker brother, by insisting upon exercising his liberty in a certain area.

None of us lives unto himself, Paul says. Even Christ did not please Himself, Paul says. He suffered the reproaches of men because of His total otherness, because of His separation from sin. He is our example.

Christians are not Christians in a vacuum. We are part of the body of Christ. The point is not that we should judge one another in such questionable matters, but that we should resolve not to put a stumbling block in the way of someone else who holds a different opinion about an issue or a practice that Scripture calls a doubtful matter. Legalism is not Biblical separation.

The Equal Danger of Permissiveness & Compromise

Now this is what often happens on the one hand when people depart from Scripture alone as the foundation of separation. Their way of looking at these things

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degenerates into legalism.

But on the other hand, if we are not careful to observe what Scripture actually says about separation, Christians individually and the church as a body just as often fall into the trap of going off in the other wrong direction, and that is the direction of permissiveness and compromise.

But what is it that defines what constitutes permissiveness and compromise? It must be the Word of God alone. Scripture alone must be the foundation of separation in order for it to be Biblical separation. Scripture alone must define what constitutes permissiveness or compromise.

That is why the words that we read at the beginning of this message are so critically important. The Word of Christ must dwell within us richly in all wisdom. And we must evaluate everything, "whatever you do in word or deed," to make sure that it qualifies to be done or said in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that it qualifies to have His mark upon it – that it is, as we read in Colossians chapter 1, "worthy of the Lord."

The fact is that Scripture defines worldliness. And the fact is that Scripture also commands us to separate ourselves from worldliness. This is something that we should be doing more and more and more.

Dear friends, many times I have heard Christians say that as time goes on, and that as you grow in your knowledge of the Scriptures, that what they call your "Christian

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liberty" increases and broadens. But dear friends, I must say on the authority of Scripture that often this reflects a very wrong view of what they call "Christian liberty."

Their view of Christian liberty is, "I can do more and more of what I want to do." And that is not the point of Christian liberty at all. Christian liberty is the liberty that Christ has purchased for us with His own blood. Christian liberty is freedom from the guilt of sin. It is freedom from the condemning wrath of God. It is freedom from the curse of the moral law.

Christian liberty is freedom from bondage to Satan. It is freedom from the dominion of sin. It is freedom of access to the throne of our Father in Heaven. And in the future, Christian liberty will include freedom from the sting of death, and freedom from the victory of the grave. It will include freedom from this present evil world, freedom not only from the power of sin but also from the very presence of sin forever.

And in the here and now, in this present life, Christian liberty is freedom to serve Christ. Christian liberty is the freedom to be in submission to the Word of God. Christian liberty is not freedom to sin, to do whatever we want, to have whatever associations we want to have, so that grace may abound. "God forbid!" Paul says in Romans. But in our time, many professing Christians and much of the professing church has clearly violated this.

"Pure Religion"

First Peter chapter 1 verse 14 tells us that in view of our present position in Christ

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we should be, in both our thinking and in our conduct,

as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He [God] who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I [God] am holy.'

And in Second Peter chapter 3, beginning at verse 10, we read this:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore [notice], since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness...?

And then the Apostle Peter continues in verse 14:

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him [by God] in peace, without spot and blameless...

And in the book of James, chapter 1, verse 27, we read that one of the key characteristics of "pure and undefiled religion before God" is "to keep oneself unspotted from the world." The word that is translated "unspotted" has the sense of being free from the evils of the world, free from the influences of the world, free from the defilements of the world, free from the stain that those things place upon the

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mind, free from those things which draw our minds and therefore our way of life away from that which pleases God.

Friendship With the World, Enmity With God

The word that is translated "pleasures" in James chapter 4 verse three is the word from which we get our English word "hedonism." There are even some today in the church who talk about "Christian hedonism" as though it were a virtue to please ourselves. Dear friends, it is not a virtue, it is evil in the eyes of God. James chapter 4 verse four calls those who go after these things "adulterers and adulteresses!"

And James goes on to say this, James chapter 4, verse four:

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

But He [God] gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Therefore submit to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

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Dear friends, there are those who say that as you grow in maturity as a Christian, that you will be able to do more and more things. You will have greater and greater freedom, and fewer and fewer restrictions in life. They call that "Christian liberty."

But I submit to you, on the authority of the Word of God, that the person who is truly a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the person who is truly indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that person will be more and more conscious of the fact that "I am the temple of the Holy Spirit." "I am the temple of the living God." I cannot think just anything. I cannot say just anything. I cannot do just anything. I cannot associate with just anyone or anything.

I must be continually conscious of the fact that friendship with the world is enmity with God. I must be continually and increasingly conscious of the fact that so many things that I might have considered permissible are in fact spiritual adultery in the eyes of God.

The Cure For Worldliness

And I must understand, on the authority of Scripture, that the cure for worldliness in my thinking and in my speaking and in my living is humility before God. Humbling myself under the mighty hand of God. Resisting the Devil. Submitting to God. Drawing near to God so that He might draw near to me. Cleansing my hands, spiritually speaking. Purifying my heart, spiritually speaking. Not being double minded, but single-minded. Lamenting and weeping and mourning about the things in my thinking and living and speaking that have displeased my God.

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And dear friends these are things that apply not only to the Christian individually but they most certainly also apply to the church as a body. These are matters of separation. And the foundation of our separation is an ever greater and deeper and wider knowledge of the Word of God.

Not merely head knowledge. Not merely knowledge for its own sake. Not knowledge that puffs up, but knowledge that humble – knowledge in order that we may be changed. Knowledge in order that the Word of God, by the power of His Spirit, may change His people and change His church.

In First John chapter 2, beginning at verse 15, we read this:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The word that is translated "love" throughout this passage is the Greek word *agape*. Self-sacrificial love. Christ's people, and Christ's church, must constantly be asking ourselves: Are we exercising *agape* love, self-sacrificial love, toward Christ and His church? Or are we falling into the trap of a love that sacrifices ourselves and our churches to the things of this present evil world?

That is the test, dear friends. That is why it is vital for you as an individual, and for

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your church as a body, to "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." And that is why it is vital for you as an individual, and for your church as a body, to measure all things by the standard of Christ. Can it be done in His name? Is it worthy of His name? Will He approve? Will it have His sanction?

Does it reflect submission to Christ and His Word, or does it reflect submission to the world and its sinful ways? Does it reflect a cleansing of the hands and purifying of the heart, or does it mean that we are soiling ourselves with the evil influences and endeavors of this present world? Is it spiritual adultery, or is it spiritual loyalty to Christ?

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