

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "The Myth of the 'Carnal Christian' " (Colossians 3:16-17, Matt. 13:18-23, Eph. 2:1-10)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/10/2014

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As we begin today let me call your attention once again to the commands of God that we find in the book of Colossians, in chapter 3, beginning at verse 16. If you are able to do so, I encourage you to open your own copy of God's Word during this message, as we examine not only this passage but also several others. So let us begin in the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God in Colossians chapter 3, verse 16:

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.

A Truth Seldom Taught – Or Lived

In our last message I placed before you a truth that we find very clearly stated in the Word of God, but it is very seldom taught in the church today. And because it is a truth that is all too rarely taught in the church today, it is also rarely lived in the church today.

We summed up this vital truth as follows: The genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is an alien in this present evil world. The person who has been truly regenerated by the work of the Spirit of God, the person who has been cleansed from his sins by the blood of Christ, the person who has been saved from the

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wrath of God and is now destined for eternal life in the New Heavens and New Earth – that person is an alien in this present evil world. The Word of God uses that particular term to describe the Christian. The Word of God also speaks of the Christian as a stranger or a foreigner in this present world.

Separation: A Matter of Both Position and Experience

That is the change in status, the change in position, that immediately takes place for an individual when that person becomes a Christian. Our status in the eyes of God has changed, and therefore our status in relation to this present world has changed.

But becoming a Christian is not only a matter of a change of our position or status. Becoming a stranger or an alien or a foreigner in this present evil world must also be a matter of experience in this present life. It is something that the true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ experiences more and more.

You will experience the outworking or the result of that change of position in relation to God and in relation to this world as you obey the command that we are given in Colossians chapter 3 verse 16, to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. As I've said before, the essence of this command in the original language is that we are to let the Word of Christ have unlimited access to our hearts and minds, and unrestricted influence on our lives.

The more that you do that, the more your heart will be prepared for and drawn

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toward the world to come. And the more you do that, the more you let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, the less and less you will be at home in this present evil world.

The Myth of the "Carnal Christian"

That is the essence of Biblical separation. That is the distinguishing mark of the genuine Christian in this present evil world. There is no such thing, dear friends, as the "carnal Christian" – the person who professes faith in Jesus Christ but then lives the rest of his life in this world as though nothing has changed.

Some preachers will try to tell you that such a thing is possible. But dear friend, the Word of God says nothing of this. The Word of God says nothing of an individual who is truly a Christian but is not endeavoring to be separated more and more from this present evil world.

Listen to me carefully: This popular definition, this false definition, of a "carnal Christian" actually means that nothing has changed for that individual. And if there is no change, that in itself is primary evidence that there is no new spiritual life in that individual.

The Lord Jesus spoke of such individuals in the parable of the sower in Matthew chapter 13. Turn with me to the book of Matthew, if you are able to do so as you are listening. Matthew chapter 13, beginning at verse 20. The Lord Jesus said this:

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But he who received the seed [that is, the seed of the Word of God] on stony places, this is he who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately he stumbles.

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the Word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and he becomes unfruitful.

There are those, as the Lord Jesus tells us here, who "received the Word with joy," and appear for a time to be Christians. But when the fact that there is a change in position for the true Christian, a change in status for the true Christian, when that reality begins to confront such an individual, when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, that individual stumbles.

The word that is translated "stumbles" here in the New King James Bible, and is translated "is offended" in the original King James, is the Greek word from which we get the English word "scandalized." This individual who hears the Word, and initially receives it with joy, and appears for a time to be a Christian, but is then faced with the reality of the demands of Biblical separation, that individual literally "becomes scandalized." That individual becomes offended or indignant at the idea that there needs to be a true change of mind, a true change of heart, a true change of orientation from love of the things of this present evil

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world to an orientation of love for the things of the world to come.

The same is true, Jesus said, for the person who hears the Word, hears the Gospel, but then "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word." Literally, in the original language, these things "suffocate the Word." Such a person is still bound up in this world. He is preoccupied with the things of this present evil world. The Lord Jesus makes it very clear that such a person is not a true Christian, and the main indicator of that fact is the simple reality that this individual is still tied up in, is still swayed by, is still ruled by, this present world-system.

But then in verse 23, the Lord Jesus gives us the definition of the characteristics of the genuine Christian:

But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the Word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some one hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Clearly, here we have the testimony of the Lord Jesus himself that there is no such thing in the economy of God as a "carnal Christian" as that individual is so often falsely defined these days in the church.

The Reality of the Backslidden Christian

There is, however, such a person as a backslidden Christian. There is the case of the individual who has truly been redeemed, who has truly endeavored to live

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the separated life, but then this person has backslidden. This person has gone back into a love for and a fellowship with this present evil world in certain ways.

The Lord Jesus gave us the classic example of such a person in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15. In that passage, the Lord Jesus speaks of an individual who was truly a son of his father. But after living in obedience and subjection to his father for a time, he then went off after the things of this world. He spent his time and his money and even his physical well-being in pursuit of the things that sinful men count to be worthwhile in this present evil world.

But we find in that parable that this young man did not remain in that condition. God convicted him of his sin. God brought him to his senses. And he returned to his father's house and repented.

Please listen to me carefully: An individual who is a Christian but has backslidden, has strayed away from the path of Biblical separation, that individual will not remain permanently in that condition. He will repent. He will come back. And that in itself, that repentance, that desire to renew a separated, sanctified way of thinking and living, is evidence of the fact that such an individual is truly a Christian, truly a blood-bought, Spirit-indwelled believer on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, dear friend, if you profess to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to ask yourself this question constantly: Am I thinking and living as an alien in this present evil world? Is that my attitude toward this world, and the

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things of this world? Am I less and less at home here, and more and more looking forward to life in the New Heavens and New Earth with Christ forever?

Or, have I perhaps in certain ways backslidden from that separated position? Have I compartmentalized my thinking and my living? Have I said in my heart that there are areas of my thinking and my living that I am going to place off-limits to the influence and the authority of the Word of Christ? You need to be asking yourself these things. The true church needs to be asking these things.

The Change of Status Wrought By Conversion

Now in our last message, I put before you a series of propositions or truths from the Word of God, that all relate to these great questions.

What does it mean for a Christian to think and to live as an alien in this present evil world? What does it mean to be spiritually separated in your relationships? How do you accomplish that – or more accurately, more Biblically, rather how does God accomplish that through you and in you – while you are still living in this world that is saturated with sin?

To answer these questions, in our last message I placed before you a series of propositions, a series of truths from the Word of God, all of which are subsidiary to the central truth that the true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is an alien in this present evil world, and that the true church of Jesus Christ is an alien body in this present world. And today I want to begin to look at those propositions in

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more detail.

First of all, we have three propositions in the Word of God that declare to us the fact that the true Christian does have a different status in the eyes of God, and a different status, a different position, in relation to this present world.

We Were Once Aliens From God

The first proposition is this: Christians were once aliens from God. Those who are now in Christ, those who are saved, those who have repented of their sins and placed their faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life, those individuals were once aliens from God and from the kingdom of God.

Let me take you to a passage earlier in the book of Colossians that speaks of this. Please turn with me if you are able to Colossians chapter 1, verse 21. Colossians chapter 1 verse 21:

And you, who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He [Jesus Christ] has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you heard...

Here the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul declares to us the great fact that we were once alienated from God. We were estranged from God. We were

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excluded from any fellowship or relationship with God. Furthermore, this passage tells us that we were enemies of God. Likewise in Isaiah chapter 59, verse 2, the prophet declared to sinful Israel:

Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

This was our position. We were once of this world, fully at home in this world, but completely separated and alienated from God. That is our first proposition.

We Are Now Aliens From This World

But the second proposition that we find in Scripture is this: those who have become Christians are now aliens from this world. Our position has been completely changed. If you have truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, your position in relation to this present world changed as soon as you were converted. The true believer in Christ is immediately an alien in this present world, from the moment of conversion.

As the Holy Spirit tells us through the Apostle Paul in the passage that we just read in Colossians chapter 1, we were once alienated from God, but now we have been reconciled to God because of the death of Christ. And in Ephesians chapter 2, beginning at verse 1, we have this great and momentous statement. Ephesians chapter 2, beginning at verse 1:

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And you He [God] made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others [just as those who are still unsaved].

Notice all of the past-tense statements in those verses. You *were* dead in trespasses and sins. You *once* walked according to the course of this world. You *once* conducted yourselves in the lusts of your flesh. You *were* by nature children of wrath, destined for eternity in Hell, just as other unbelievers.

But then we have the great contrast beginning in verse 4 of Ephesians chapter 2:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

The position of the believer in Christ has entirely changed. Those past-tense conditions of verses 1 through 3 are no longer true for the genuine believer in Christ. What is now true is that we have become the recipients of the mercy of God. We have become the objects of the eternal love of God. We who were once

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dead in our sins are now alive in Christ. We who were once bound by the course of this present evil world, we who once walked according to the will of Satan, "the prince of the power of the air," have now been raised up out of that bondage. We have been made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

So the first proposition that we find in the pages of Scripture is that Christians were once aliens from God. And the second proposition is that we are now aliens from this world. A cosmic change of position has taken place for the true believer in Jesus Christ.

We Have Been Made Aliens For An Eternal Purpose

And then we find a third great proposition in the Word of God, and it is this: God has made you an alien in this present evil world for an eternal purpose.

Let me continue reading in Ephesians chapter 2, at verse 7. God has done the things that He has done for the believer in Christ – notice, verse 7 –

that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

God has made us aliens in this present evil world for a momentous and cosmic reason – so that He might in the ages to come – in the glories of the New Heavens and the New Earth – "show" – literally that He might put on display before the entire created order, the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness

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toward us in Christ Jesus. But it is not only a matter of our future in the glory, it is also a matter of our experience in this present world. Notice the verse that follows, verse eight:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast. [Notice, verse 10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

God has saved us, God has converted us, God has set us apart in Christ, God has separated us, as His workmanship, as Ephesians chapter 1 tells us, "before the foundation of the world" – for good works. Eternally prepared works. Works that God prepared even before the foundation of the world in order that we should walk in them – literally, in order that these things should be our occupation in this present world, our way of conducting ourselves in this present world, our way of making progress toward glory while we are still in this present evil world.

What does this mean for you as an individual? It means that for the Christian, spiritual separation is not an option. God separated you positionally from this present evil world when He placed you in Christ. And God's purpose for doing so is that you might live a life that is separated not only positionally but experientially in this present evil world. Your position in Christ demands it. And what is true of

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God's people individually is also therefore true of Christ's church as a body. The very nature of the true church of Jesus Christ demands spiritual separation from the world as the hallmark of the church's way of life and witness.

Now this brings us to a very vital question: How does God accomplish this? How does God bring about spiritually separated thinking and living in the individual Christian and in His church as a body? That will bring us to the next section of the ten propositions we are considering together, and the Lord willing we will take up this question from the Word of God in our next 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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