

The Case for Separation

Biblical separation is possibly the most neglected teaching in Christianity today, especially in the West. Through sheer neglect (or unbelief), the life of the Christian is reinvented as being a mere statement of belief apart from any change of life, or relationship to a world of ungodliness. The Gospel is reduced to this: "One accepts Jesus into his heart. God forgives. Heaven is sure. That's it." But nothing has changed. The new Christianity does not usher in the divine grace of transformation that breaks the old sin patterns and brings forth a life ordered by God. Instead, it has invented a divine blindfold, where God no longer sees the sin of the Christian.

But God is not mocked. Heaven is reserved not for those who merely profess Jesus as Lord, but for those who do the will of the Father in Heaven. Salvation results in single-minded devotion to God, producing a separation from the world and the powers of darkness. Separation is the principle whereby Christians live "in the world without being of the world." Separation serves as a divinely prescribed respirator, sparing every godly person from the toxic effects of sin that dooms the multitudes on the broad way to destruction. Rather than adopting the destructive ways and values of the world, children of God receive their orders from God, through careful and faithful application to Biblical commands and teaching.

Separation has both a long history and an eternal future. In the beginning of creation, God separated natural light from natural darkness, a major factor in making the world habitable. Spiritually, He applies principles of light versus darkness as the litmus test of any people who claim a relationship with Him. *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth"* (1 John 1:6).

In the beginning, God, in six days, created everything by the power of His own Word. He filled the universe, like a giant canvas, in a mind-boggling, breathtaking display of His infinite power, His wisdom, His glory, and His majesty. Even though this is now a fallen world, all nature obeys Him still, for God upholds it all by the same Word of His power. Yet even before the Fall, in a still perfect universe, God separated one tree in the middle of Eden with the command, *"Thou shalt not eat."*

Without exception, the lifestyle choices of godly men of history were regulated by command of God. Adam failed the test. But Noah, moved with fear, built the ark to exact divine specifications, and separated himself and his family from the plight of the ungodly.

Abraham (designated spiritual father of all the faithful), at the command of God, deserted the idolatrous city of his ancestors. He left the love of the world to dwell in tents, but gained the eternal city of God. Moses made the early choice to reject worldly pleasure to embrace the hardships of the godly. Probably the greatest leader of all time, Moses regularly and specifically received the ordered ways of God for his people. Sacrifice, worship, dietary instruction, wardrobe, giving, sanitation, principles of marriage and of justice—no details escaped the notice of God. This obedience would set Israel apart as a wise and understanding people in a pronounced separation from nations who had long departed from the ways of God, who were slated for judgment and destruction.

And yes, separation does have an eternal future. In the Day of the Lord, all who ever lived and breathed will stand before God in judgment. All will be judged, not by profession of Christianity, not by miracles or prophecies, nor by brownie points of accumulating good deeds (some of the biggest givers of our day do not know God), but according as we have done the will of the Father in Heaven. In that day, the sheep will be forever separated from the goats. The righteous will inherit the kingdom prepared for them. The wicked will be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God.

The contrast could hardly be more striking. The pursuit of worldliness is temporal and meets a horrific end, for the friend of the world has made himself an enemy of God. Separation unto God is good for the present life and for eternity. It is the only permanence available within a temporal system. *For the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.* Strange, isn't it, that we should be so enamored with "forbidden fruit" of this world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, which all are to pass away, and mark its adherents for judgment? Equally strange, isn't it, that questionable things, and even the deeds of darkness of the world should be preferred to the glorious light of the commandments of God?

Billy Graham made a striking point in a message at a missions conference in Urbana, Illinois, in 1987. His language appeared wistful as he addressed 18,000 people (mostly college students) and recalls a message by one Donald Grey Barnhouse, a message Graham had heard in a similar conference in 1948. Even after those thirty-nine years, Billy said, "I'll never forget his message on separation from the world."

Now quoting Graham again: "We have gotten away from that. We have moved in with the world and allowed the world to penetrate the way we live. So things we used to call sin are no longer sin. Things that we would have abhorred a few years ago, we accept as matter of fact today, not realizing that they offend a holy God."

Earlier in that same message, Graham referred to TV: "It's almost embarrassing to turn on the television set. We do not realize how this offends a holy and righteous God. We act as if it doesn't really matter how we live or what we think or say because God will forgive us anyway."

Thus, Billy Graham exposed the heart of the matter. But has Christianity made any kind of a turnaround? The indicators of acceptable Christian culture and practice indicate that we

have not. **We are no longer afraid not to do the will of God.** We seem bent more than ever to reject the redeeming commands of our Creator/Saviour, preferring to blindly copy the degrading cultural practices of the world. Thus the signals come, not from God, but from deniers and haters of God. He who would be the friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Typical Mr. and Mrs. Christian (and their offspring) are mere imitators of ungodly culture. Yet they would be shocked at the idea of being enemies of God. The result is what we have repeatedly reflected upon in this column. Many people in the churches reflect the same failure of basic standards—the loss of integrity and truthfulness, personal shamelessness and immodesty (marked by exposure of the body), music that banishes the echoes of tender conscience by glorifying lawlessness and sexual immorality, church youth groups give over to fornication, adulterous elders, and broken homes. In this way, the “church” is in affinity with a world at enmity against God, aligning with the multitudes of those who treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the day of perdition of ungodly men, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

But what does the Bible say? *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ...: and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God ... **Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty**”* (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

~Lester Troyer