

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CHRISTIAN SEPARATION?

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Let's Begin

Famed Christian author, A.W. Tozer, once said, "Most Christians are not joyful persons because they are not holy persons, and they are not holy persons because they are not filled with the Holy Spirit, and they are not filled with the Holy Spirit because they are not separated persons." For Tozer, the key to usefulness in God's service was to be separated. He dubbed it the "separated person." Few Christian bodies take note of Biblical holiness. Fewer still practice what once was common, Christian separation.

By separation, they did not understand believers were to be isolated from the world. Instead, it was emphasized believers were not to be contaminated by the world. In other words, the Christian's moral integrity would not be compromised through any contact with worldly lifestyles.

No passage of Scripture stands taller than 2 Corinthians 6 in instructing believers in the fine art of Christian separation. Hence, as we study the chapter together, let's follow the outline below:

- I. **Christian Separation Involves a Principle to be Upheld (vv. 1-13)**
- II **Christian Separation Involves a Prohibition to be Understood (vv. 14-16)**
- III. **Christian Separation Involves a Promise to be Underscored (v. 17)**
- IV. **Christian Separation Involves a Process to be Undertaken (v. 18; 7:1)**

I. Christian Separation Involves a Principle to be Upheld (vv. 1-13)

Becoming a Christian is more than verbally proclaiming Jesus is one's Savior. Rather becoming a Christian means Jesus is one's Lord. And, Jesus *as* Lord means Jesus *is* Lord over one's entire life. Christian separation is the inevitable result of the Lordship of Christ. We are committed to the principle of separation.

Paul opens the chapter with words designed to exhort, "We then, *as* workers together *with him*, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.... Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all *things* approving ourselves as the ministers of God..." (2 Cor. 6:1-4a). Paul placed himself in the same category as other servants were placed.

Obviously, as an Apostle, he could have made a hard distinction between the average, everyday servant and an Apostle, specifically chosen for high office. Great men are rarely found bragging about either accomplishments or position. Instead they have a basic, undeniable humility about them. Why? As Paul mentions in verse 1, all ministry is about receiving God's grace. Hence, every servant's goal—whether Apostle or other—is about "approving ourselves as the ministers of God..." Thus, the servant's *attitude* is spiced with humility and grace.

Next, the Apostle notes the *adversities* of our ministry (vv. 4b-5). Being a believer will not satisfy all our desires or solve all our problems. In fact Paul becomes intense, cataloging one difficulty after another: afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, and labours among others. Looking closely at the list will reap distinctions between difficulties that are common, difficulties specifically physical, and difficulties within the vocational life. For Paul, no realm the Christian touches remains vacuous of difficulties. Indeed Paul demonstrates in these verses the necessity of believers

Reflection Connection

When you think of Christian service, do you think of roles more worthy, more rewarding, or more pleasing to God? Why or why not?



being in the world. The believer's challenge is to avoid becoming a part of the world.

In addition, Paul observes several *attributes* of our ministry in the world (vv. 6-7). As he cataloged afflictions we endure, he also catalogues attributes we exemplify. Among others he lists pureness, knowledge, longsuffering, kindness, and love, thus representing moral as well as emotional attributes. He then rounds out the list with spiritual attributes, "By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" (v. 7).

Finally, the adversities we experience and the attributes we exhibit must inevitably face *assessment* (vv. 8-10). And, for Paul, assessment of our ministry covered several spheres including social, physical, and emotional. No believer's life contains locked rooms where the Lordship of Christ lacks authority.

II Christian Separation Involves a Prohibition to be Understood (vv. 14-16)

Christian separation not only involves standing on the Lordship principle, Christian separation also observes specific boundaries. Paul writes, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

The key to understanding Christian separation, according to Paul, is, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." After all, Paul argues, Christian separation is the most *sensible* thing to do. At this juncture, the Apostle appeals to our innate sense of logic by contrasting righteousness with unrighteousness, light with darkness, Christ with Belial, and believers with unbelievers. Paul's purpose is clear: a

Christian is polar opposite a non-Christian. Hence, when believers make strong connections with the world, it remains the Christian who always loses.

In addition, Christian separation is the most *desirable* thing to do (v. 16). Christians are God's temple (cp. 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19; Eph. 2:22). Being a Jew and a former Pharisee, a more radical statement Paul could not make. Nevertheless, he affirms God dwells *in* them and walks *in* them!

In the end, love creates the desire for separation. Christian separation is not about fear of the world. Nor is it about superstitious notions that Christians must live in a bubble apart from the world. Instead, Christian separation is about loving Jesus with all one's heart. Being separate is about denying one's self, taking up a cross and following hard after Christ. Christian separation is, in the

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end, Christian discipleship, living consistently with Christian profession. As the old adage exhorts, it's practicing what you preach!

Sometimes Christian separation will mean walking away from a relationship. It may mean leaving a particular employer. Christian separation may also mean a relationship between a young man and a young woman must be severed before they begin considering marriage. While this may sound either unlivable or overly harsh, we must recall that, in the end, we belong to another. Our love for Christ must trump any desire we may have on this earth.

III. Christian Separation Involves a Promise to be Underscored (v. 17)

Already we have noted God's promise to be among His people, even *in* His people (v. 16). Paul further affirms the believer's confidence that God is with him or her every step of the process. He writes, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you," (v. 17). To obey God's call is to receive God's promise. In fact, obedience results in God responding, "I will receive you." So just what does it mean for God to receive us?

First, it means we have the Father's favor. When God receives us, He favors us. Our lives are showered with grace. We share His life. We experience His love. We receive His gifts. We join His eternal Kingdom. Separation means we enter into His love, living His life goals for us rather than our own. Hence, we develop a heart that never desires anything other than to please Him. Entanglement with the world threatens such a beautiful bond. Therefore, we separate ourselves unto Jesus.

Second, God's reception means we have the Father's fellowship. God says to those whom He receives, He will be, "a Father unto you" (v. 18). Is there a more blessed promise in the Word of God? God will be our Father! More than anything a good Father desires the best for his children. He showers them with gifts. He meets their every need. He protects them from stranger and enemy alike. He covers them with shelter and nurses them when sick. His bank account is at their disposal when their lives are threatened. Whatever it takes, he will supply. Why? They are his children. If earthly fathers can have a radically deep love for his children, how much more could an omnipotent, eternal Father love His children! (cp. Matt. 7:11).

IV. Christian Separation Involves a Process to be Undertaken (v. 18; 7:1)

Finally, even though Christian separation is a stated *principle*—the principle of Jesus' Lordship over our lives—upon which we stand, we must not fail to grasp that Christian separation is also a *process* to be undertaken on a daily basis. In other words, Christian separation is synonymous with *sanctification* (cp. 1 Cor. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:3). In fact, as one reads the entire sixth chapter, separation's process is a thread interwoven throughout.



However, the best summary statement is found in the first verse of chapter 7. And, while we will consider this verse more in our next lesson, it is fitting to draw a few truths from it as we round out our study of Christian separation. Paul writes, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (7:1). For no better summary of Christian separation could we hope. Paul instructs us as to precisely how separation works.

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First, there is a negative side to separation. Paul makes the negative clear as he focuses on the call to “cleanse ourselves.” Observe: unlike the Pharisees who made it their life goal to zero

in on other people’s lives as if they were the morality police, separation is mainly about watching our own lives not the lives of others. Following from this is a self-reflective frame of mind. Contrary to some who interpret separation as being severely judgmental toward others, separation is primarily judgmental toward one’s self. It is being one’s own morality police.

Additionally, the “cleansing” is *positional* in nature. In other words, “cleansing” is something God does (cp. Rev. 1:5). God’s Spirit because of Christ’s shed blood washes us sparkling clean from dirty guilt, dingy shame, and deplorable sin. On the other hand, “cleansing” is also *practical* in nature. Our *position* is in Christ; God put us there. However, our *condition* is *practical*, meaning there is activity we pursue (cp. James 1:27).

While regeneration is *passive*—God alone does the regenerating—sanctification is *active*. We pursue good works. Indeed elsewhere Paul makes it clear performing good works is part of the built-in design of being a Christian. He writes, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10).

Note well the Apostles’ words, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Good works are part of the design of being a Christian. We must not get the impression, however, that good works in any way save us. Again, Paul is clear, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works...” Grace alone through faith alone by Jesus Christ alone is the salvation formula throughout Scripture and the dictum of every biblical church since the Apostles.

Yet good works are designed in God’s plan of redemption. An old preacher once said, “Faith is the root of our salvation, and good works is the fruit of our salvation. Never confuse the two.” Good works flow naturally from genuine faith. We perform good work not to be saved; rather we perform good works because we are saved! And, performing good works is simply another way of practicing Christian separation.

Reflection Connection

If we are called to “cleanse ourselves” why do we need God to “cleanse” us? If we really do “cleanse” ourselves are we not depending on human works? Why or why not?



Golden Greek Nugget

Paul makes the most explicit reference to Christian separation when he writes, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (v. 14). A single Greek term (*heterozugeo*) translates the pair of English terms translated as “yoked together.” The Greek word is actually a compound from two other Greek words, one meaning “other” or “another thing” and the second word meaning “to join.” It often was used when speaking of a team of cattle or oxen being “yoked together”; that is, one was joined to another and worked as a single unit. What a colorful image the Apostle gives us concerning the marriage relationship. One believer joined to another believer walking through life as a single unit.

Wrap Up

In this study, we learn Christian separation is far from what many today suppose. Too often we are told separation is unhealthy and backward. Separation kills evangelism because Christians are implored to isolate themselves from the world; believers must bunker themselves down into a hole and wait for Jesus to come and rescue them. Such a caricature does havoc to the Word of God and dishonors the Christian life. Separation does not mean to withdraw from the world. Indeed our Lord insisted believers are in the world (John 16:33); however, believers cannot be of the world (John 15:19). The bottom line is, separation is no more and no less than living out the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

