



Separation in the Christian's Mental Life

Thoughts

All practical godliness must begin with the thought life of the Christian, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Separation in the thought life is particularly important because the Christian possesses two natures: two dispositions which are continually striving with each other for the control of the believer (Galatians 5:17). If the Christian is to "walk in the Spirit," he must distinguish the desires of the Spirit. To make the differentiation easy, Paul has given the believer an objective criterion for distinguishing the desires of the flesh from the desires of the Spirit in the form of a list of examples (see Galatians 5:19-23). By meditating upon this list, the Christian will be able to readily discern between the desires of his old nature and those of the Holy Spirit and will, by obeying His desires, be controlled by the Spirit.

Reading and other activities

The realization that the Christian still possesses his old nature, as a kind of caged-up wild beast looking for a way to get out, ought to make him careful of the kind of "food for thought" he allows to come in. The Christian must distinguish between that which feeds the flesh and that which nourishes his new nature in the things which he allows to enter through the eyes and ears. David failed to turn his head at the first glimpse of Bathsheba, and paid the consequences. Split-second discernment and reaction is becoming imperative for the Christian living in a world where modest women dress like the harlots of ten years ago.

Attitudes

To be pleasing to the Lord, the right thing must be done in the right way. Israel had served the Lord, and yet He said:

Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things, therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies whom the LORD shall send against thee" (Deut. 28:47-48).

The Christian must be extremely discriminatory in the choice of attitudes which he manifests. He must be as set apart from wrong attitudes as he is from wrong actions. As the Apostle Paul stated:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

The true Christian, then, will be a fanatical separatist with regards to his own attitudes.

Separation in the Christian's Physical Life

Dress

The Christian's outward appearance is a matter of concern to the Apostle Paul, particularly in the case of Christian women for whom he lays down some guidelines: "In like manner also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel (1 Timothy 2:9). Modesty in dress, especially today, requires careful discrimination. The Christian is not to be conformed to the world's sensuous standards, and must set aside the majority of the fashions of today. At the same time, the Christian ought to display good taste in the clothing he wears, and not draw attention to himself with extremism in either direction. Pastor George F. Parsons has set forth the following principle:

Whenever a new style or a new way of dressing or a new way of saying something is seen or heard by me, I will look to see if it pictures truth or error. I will see if it agrees or disagrees with God's Word and God's ways. I will see if it makes clear or confuses and clouds up God's Person and God's Word. I will see if it mixes truth and error. May nothing detract from the message I want to present: "I belong to the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Physical contact

The Christian is most certainly to be discriminatory to the extreme, however, in the matter of which he touches. Absolute separation is axiomatic for married or unmarried Christians of opposite sex, other than his or her very own spouse. This is particularly true for the Christian worker:

A minister, especially a young one, who puts his hands, however innocent-mindedly on the person of womankind, particularly young girls, is in the mildest language I can command, an unmitigated fool.

The Christian is thus to be set apart in this regard, too.

Entertainment

While proper recreation and exercise are necessary for the Christian, the Christian must use discernment in the activities in which he engages in leisure time. The Christian is to be separate from "worldly amusements

and unclean habits which defile mind and body.” A chapel speaker recently gave a good rule of thumb for deciding about doubtful things: Anything that dims my vision of Christ, or takes away my taste for Bible study, or cramps my prayer life, or makes Christian work difficult is wrong for me and as a Christian I must turn from it.

To “turn from” something is separation: we are beginning to see something of the scope of this subject!

Speech

Discrimination is also the order in the use of the Christian’s tongue. Every thought which comes to mind is not to be broadcast by the child of God. Paul makes this clear: Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers (Ephesians 4:29).

The Christian is thus to be drastically selective in his choice of words. Not only is he to separate out all vulgarity from his speech, but positively, his words are to be a blessing to the hearers.

Separation in the Christian’s Social Life

Friendships

While the Christian is to exhibit genuine love for all of mankind, the Word of God makes it clear that a believer is to be discriminatory in the choice of his close companions (see Psalm 119:63). Solomon saw that, “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20). The Apostle Paul likewise noted, “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Corinthians 15:33). As Dr. John Whitcomb has observed, “All things being equal, bad apples make good apples go rotten, and the good apples do not make the rotten ones any better.” Thus, while the Christian is to be cordial towards all, especially towards those of like precious faith, he, nevertheless, is to be selective in his choice of close companionships. The best way to do this, of course, is to have the right interests, and to allow our interests to govern our close friendships.

Courtship

If ever there were an area where neglect of separation has led to heartbreak, it must be in the realm of courtships. How often have we heard stories of a Christian dating a non-Christian for the sake of witnessing, with a resultant unscriptural (and usually disastrous) marriage. Yet the practice of Christians dating unbelievers continues. Since it is certainly not God’s will for a child of God to marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14,

“Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers”), one is hard pressed to defend any position other than total separation of Christians and non-Christians in the area of dating.

Career

“In occupation the Christian should remember that God is his senior partner.” The Christian should therefore beware of making partnerships with unbelievers. Moreover, the Christian businessman must be discriminative in his business methods. The dishonest practices which are a matter of course in many firms are to be put away from the Christian in the business world.

Separation in the Christian’s Spiritual Life

The personal devotional life

In order for the Levitical priests to enter into the Holy of Holies, they themselves had to be holy. The Christian, then, ought to be discriminative in his own devotional activities. This would apply, for example, to the Bible version which he reads. Peter says, “Desire the sincere (pure) milk of the word . . . (1 Peter 2:2). A paraphrase may be good for occasional comparison, but it ought not to be the daily food for the Christian’s soul. The prayer life, too, ought to be purged from all that is unfit for God’s presence. The Christian, especially the young Christian, ought to make a distinction between talking to the Lord of Hosts and “shooting the breeze” with his dormitory roommate.

Fellowship with other Christians

The Apostle John says, “We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). The joy of fellowship with other true believers is indeed a blessed assurance of the Christian’s salvation. Nevertheless, the Word of God plainly teaches that there are times when the obedient believer must purposefully part company with disobedient fellow Christians. This is true in the case of a brother who is living in sin. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no, not to eat (1 Corinthians 5:11).

This is also true, however, in the case of a brother who teaches doctrinal error or who fails to obey the truth:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us . . . and if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14).

This instruction seems like hard medicine to swallow, but as the Apostle points out, it is in order that the brother in the error may take stock of himself and turn from it.

The Church

If a Christian is to be separated from individuals who hold to and teach doctrinal error, he most certainly is to be separated from entire assemblies with the same problem. Withdrawing from a much loved church which has fallen into error is not easy, but it may remedy the problem. In any event, it is unethical to remain in and teach a doctrinal position contrary to that held by the assembly. The Christian ought to withdraw in such a case, and pray that God will open the eyes of the congregation.

AXIOMS OF SEPARATION

(Condensed from Pastor John E. Ashbrook's book by the same name)

1. Scripture forbids us to have fellowship with unbelief.
2. Scripture commands us to reprove apostasy.
3. Scripture teaches us that we must purge unbelief if we can.
4. Scripture teaches that believers and unbelievers cannot be yoked together in spiritual endeavor. (II Cor 6:14-18)
5. Scripture teaches us to separate from disobedient brethren.
6. God's work done God's way produces only good results. God's work done man's way produces good and bad results.
7. Do not affiliate your church with any church, mission, movement or evangelistic effort which does not fully believe the Word of God.
8. Do not affiliate your church with any church, mission, movement or evangelistic effort which does not practice biblical separation.
9. You cannot preserve a position without crusading for it.
10. When in doubt, don't join.
11. Separation is not the answer to every disagreement between brethren.
12. The spirit of God has never led one Christian contrary to one word of the Word of God.

13. At any given time of church history, God is most severe on those whom he is using at the moment.