



## The Biblical Separation

### Separation:

Bible separation is the practice of separating from sin and error unto truth and righteousness.

### Three types of separation

In the N.T. we find three basic areas of separation. The Christian is to practice Moral Separation--separation from sin and worldliness; Doctrinal Separation--separation from those whose teaching and practice is contrary to that of the apostles; and Practical Separation--separation from brethren who are committed to disobedient paths.

### Moral Separation

There are many, many passages of Scripture which teach that the Christian is to separate from sin. We are commanded to put sin out of our lives and to avoid fellowship with the evil things of the world. Of the many passages we could consider, let us use but one, Ephesians chapter five. Here God begins by telling His children to "walk in love." And how is this done? The rest of the chapter tells us, and we see that much of the chapter is devoted to instruction about separation from evil things. This is part of godly love! Consider with me some simple lessons from this chapter, lessons about moral separation, or separation from sin.

1. Moral separation is involved in true Christian love (Eph. 5:1-3).
2. Moral separation is a very careful, strict separation (Eph. 5:3-11). (See also 2 Co. 7:1; 1 Th. 5:22; 4:1-4).
3. The cause of moral separation: (1) We separate because we have a new position (Eph. 5:3,8), We don't separate in order to be saved, but because we have been saved! (2) We separate because we have a new Spirit (Eph. 5:9). (3) We separate because we have a new purpose (Eph. 5:10).
4. Moral separation involves rebuke of sin (Eph. 5:11). Separation from sin is active as well as passive. It is not only a personal matter, but something I am to require of others. God tells the Christian not to fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but the responsibility does not stop there. God even requires that the Christian "put his nose in

other people's business" and "reprove them" for their sinful ways. This might very well be a major reason why so many refuse to practice biblical separation!

5. Moral separation means being different--not avoiding sinners, but avoiding sin (Eph. 5:11). The Christian is not told to avoid the sinner, but the sinner's works. See also Eph. 4:17-29; 1 Pet. 4:1-4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17.

6. There are two aspects of this moral separation--negative and positive. We are to SEPARATE FROM all evil (Eph. 5:3-8), and we are to SEPARATE UNTO all righteousness and truth (Eph. 5:9). We must be careful not to exercise only one part of this separation. It is important, in other words, to separate FROM sin, but it is equally important to separate UNTO holiness. See also 1 Ti. 6:11; 1 Th. 1:9; and Tit. 2:15.

7. Moral separation means doing the perfect will of God (Eph. 5:10,17).

8. Moral separation, while negative, is an important testimony to those who are lost (Eph. 5:13). Moral separation is light to those in darkness. This, of course, is exactly the opposite of what many are teaching. Many are saying that the way to win the world to Christ is to be more like the world. Hence we have strange things like "Christian" rock bands, and "Christian" movie stars who perform in wicked nightclubs, and "Christian" sports stars who frequently ignore the assembly and dedicate themselves to playing and practicing their sport when they should be in the house of God. God's Word says that His people are lights to the unbelievers by BEING DIFFERENT, by being separated from the appearance of evil, not by BEING WORLDLY!

9. Moral separation is necessary for spiritual growth and clarity of spiritual understanding (Eph. 5:14).

10. Moral separation is necessary for making one's Christian life count to the fullest for God (Eph. 5:16-17).

11. Moral separation can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). God commands that His people separate from sin, but He does not tell us to do this in our own power. We are to conquer evil through the power of the blessed indwelling Holy Spirit, the very same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Here is the power to overcome every evil habit, to say no to the world's temptations and to the devil's enticements. Through this mighty Power we who are born again can say confidently with the Apostle Paul, "I can do ALL things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi. 4:13).

## **Doctrinal Separation**

The second kind of separation God requires of the Christian is doctrinal separation. Sound apostolic doctrine is to be preserved by the churches while false doctrine is to be avoided. Doctrinal separation can be further divided into two aspects: **First, we are to**

**separate from those who teach false doctrine. And secondly, we are to separate from the entire apostate last-days Christianity.**

Let us consider these forms of separation in more detail.

We are to separate from those who teach false doctrines. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). See also 2 Jn. 8-11; Re. 2:2.

In this passage we are plainly commanded to mark and avoid those who teach false doctrine. A question arises here. Which doctrines are to be used as the basis for this separation? The answer is that any apostolic doctrine clearly presented in the Bible is a basis for fellowship and separation. To my knowledge, the N.T. never divides doctrine into "essential" and "non-essential," or into "fundamental" and "peripheral." Men do this today, but the Apostles did not. It is true that some doctrines are more important than others, but nowhere in Scripture do we read that portions of God's Word, rightly divided and properly understood, are of no significance and can therefore be put aside as peripheral. I realize this is contrary to popular thinking, but consider upon the following verses very carefully and I believe you will see that this is correct: Phi. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Th. 2:15; 2 Ti. 1:13. In these references Christians are not exhorted to follow only the major apostolic doctrines. All apostolic doctrine and example is to be obeyed (Ac. 2:42).

Some speak of the "fundamentals of the faith," and use four, five, or six doctrines as the basis for unity and separation. Others use as their basis for fellowship a man-made creed such as the Nicene Creed or the so-called Apostles Creed, while others use labels such as "evangelical," or "renewal." But nowhere in Scripture are we told that our basis for unity and separation is to be limited only to a few major doctrines and creed statements, or to any man-made label--particularly labels which have become so watered-down and contaminated they have lost any scriptural meaning they once carried.

How do we know what is major, anyway! Who are we, which we can pick and choose among apostolic teachings, setting some teachings aside as non-essential and exalting others as "major"? Following are some examples of doctrines which are important enough to be a basis for separation:

**1. Doctrine regarding Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Salvation is to be a basis for separation** (2 Co. 11:3,4). Note that not only was Paul concerned that the churches be right in regard to the Gospel and to Jesus Christ, but he fought to see that they were right about the Holy Spirit. If this attitude were maintained today, we would see more concern about the charismatic errors.

**2. Doctrine regarding prophecy and future things, such as the resurrection and death is to be a basis for separation** (2 Ti. 2:16-18). The Holy Spirit identified Hymenaeus and Philetus as false teachers. What was their error? Only one was mentioned, and that was their error of saying the resurrection had passed already. This

is a matter of prophecy, of future events. Here, then, it is clear that the doctrines of prophetic matters are important to the Holy Spirit. They are essential, fundamental doctrine. How different this is to the many Christian leaders, even professedly fundamental men, who have placed eschatology in the realm of tertiary doctrine.

**3. Doctrine regarding the church is to be a basis for separation** (1 Tim. 3:15; 6:13-14; 6:20-21). Much of the N.T. pertains to church doctrine and practice. We find the Apostles giving a great deal of their attention to training the Christians and early church leaders in the government, discipline, organization, and function of the assembly. This is the purpose for the first epistle to Timothy; Paul was writing to instruct Timothy in church business (1 Ti. 3:15). He concluded the epistle with the exhortation that these church things are to be kept in detail until the coming of Christ.

This is what the Holy Spirit thinks of church doctrine. There are more than 100 references to the church in the Bible, and even in the epistles not directly written to local assemblies, the church remains in view (Tit. 1:5; He. 10:25; 13:7,17; Jam. 2:2; 5:14; 1 Pe. 5:1-4; 2 Jn. 9). The glorified Christ is standing in the midst of the churches (Re. 2-3), and seven times the phrase is used, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." I do not understand how men can look at such a staggering amount of teaching--more than is given on many other Bible doctrines--then put church doctrine in a non-essential category, a mere matter of personal preference.

**4. Doctrine regarding holy living is to be a basis for separation** (1 Ti. 6:3-5). The passage teaches plainly that Christians are to withdraw themselves from those who deny the doctrine according to godliness. What a tremendously accurate prophesy of our day! There are multitudes of Christian leaders in practically every sphere of Christendom who literally scoff at those who still preach against worldliness and maintain strict standards for Christian morality.

Divorce and adultery are rampant in many denominations. Homosexuality is widely accepted as an alternate lifestyle. Some denominations have ordained homosexual preachers. In fact, one entire denomination, the Metropolitan Community Churches, is composed of homosexuals. The world's vile theater, cinema, and music are reviewed in Christian publications, and brought into the churches, not to speak of the homes, lives, hearts, and minds of professing Christians. Yes, many deny the doctrine of godliness. The Holy Spirit commanded "from such withdraw thyself." In light of these conditions, I don't find it odd that modern translations would handily delete this phrase!

Actually, though, the doctrine of godliness is an essential, a fundamental doctrine according to the teaching of the Word of God.

These references show that the true apostolic basis for separation is much broader than a few major doctrines. If you are a Christian worker, you surely know that it has become popular to select certain doctrines such as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, Inspiration of Scripture, and Salvation by Grace and make these the only or primary basis for

fellowship and separation. In other words, if a professing Christian claims to hold these doctrines, he is to be accepted as a true brother in good standing no matter what is not biblical thinking or practices he holds apart from these major doctrines.

Certainly this is the philosophy which holds together such the hodgepodge of doctrinal confusion that we find at many large ecumenical meetings. An illustration of this philosophy is found in a book on cults entitled *Whom Then Can We Believe?* by supposedly evangelical authors Maurice Burrell and J. Stafford Wright. The authors say, "We are not concerned about peripheral beliefs but with the fundamental issues of the nature of God and His movement to save fallen mankind.

OUR POSITION IS THAT WHICH ALL THE CHURCHES, CATHOLIC, ORTHODOX, AND PROTESTANT, INCLUDING THE DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES, HAVE ALWAYS REGARDED AS TRUTH." To say that the only essential doctrines are those held in common by all Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches, might sound reasonable to many in this mixed-up hour, but this is utterly contrary to the type of separation taught and practiced by the Lord's Apostles.

Let us follow the apostles' exhortations and example, using their basis of separation, rather than that of Protestantism, evangelicalism, popular Christianity, or some man's systematic theology. The Psalmist said, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto ALL thy commandments" (Ps. 119:6).

We are to separate from apostate last-days Christianity. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Ti. 3:5). See also He. 13:9-13; Re. 18:4.

The Apostles warned that conditions within professing Christendom would grow increasingly apostate as the time of Christ's return draws nearer. This, of course, is exactly what we observe in church history. This is what we see in the Christian world today. Most Christian groups do not follow the Word of God. What are we told to do to protest this apostasy (falling away from the Bible faith)? How are we to protect ourselves and those for whom we are responsible--our families, our friends, our churches?

God's command is to separate. Come out! Mark and avoid all of the ecumenical, doctrinally corrupt world councils and national councils. Shun the denominations and organizations that glory in their so-called "unity in diversity." That is simply a fancy phrase for their rebellion to the Bible. Have nothing whatsoever to do with the local ecumenical clergy associations.

Touch not those Charismatic and Third-wave movements which are bringing together truth with error and which are intermingled with many unscriptural teachings. Will we follow the way of man, or will we hear and heed the cry of God from Heaven? "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

