

Faith Pulpit

Faith Baptist Theological Seminary

Ankeny, Iowa

November 1993

Personal Separation

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1. The Pattern of Separation

One of the recurrent themes of the Bible is that of separation. In the opening verses of the Word of God, the Creator separates light from darkness, water from land, and sky from sea. In the closing paragraphs of the Bible God separates the old earth from the new creation, the sinners from the saints, and the unholy angels from the holy angels.

Throughout His Word, God calls on His people to separate from evil. False worship, false doctrine, and false conduct are to be avoided (Ex. 20:3ff; Deut. 5:6ff; Deut. 18:9). When His people do separate, He commends them. For example, God praises the children of Israel for returning from the Babylonian captivity because they “had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel” (Ezra 6:21).

In the New Testament, the revelation concerning separation is even more detailed. Worship of God must be according to truth and thus free of all error (Jn. 4:24). It is important to note that demands made on Church-age believers are greater than those made on individuals in any other dispensation. No Old Testament believer was told to have the mind of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). However, with greater responsibility comes greater enablement, as the Holy Spirit indwells permanently every individual (Jn. 14:16).

The Christian is called upon to “prove all things, and to hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The New Testament writers describe the spiritual believer as one who possesses the ability to discriminate all things (1 Cor. 2:15) and to discern between good and evil (Heb. 4:15). Life is full of choices, and the discerning disciple has always made decisions guided by his knowledge of the Word of God and love for the Lord.

2. The Purpose of Separation

Under the Mosaic Law the individual was obligated to obey 613 specific commandments involving judicial, moral, and ceremonial aspects of life in the theocracy of Israel. Strict adherence to every detail of the Mosaic Law was a prerequisite for blessing. If the believer obeyed, he could expect blessings; if he disobeyed, he would be cursed (Mal. 3:9,10)

The believer in the dispensation of grace is under a different legal code, the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), involving hundreds of specific commandments. The motivation for obedience, however, is totally different than it was for the Israelites under the Mosaic Law. The Church Age believer obeys not in

order to be blessed but because he has been blessed (Rom. 12:1,2). Paul expects the believers to obey God because of “the mercies of God,” (Rom. 12:1)—the manifold blessings He graciously gives to us as part of the redemption through Christ. Part of the believer’s obedience involves refusal to be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2). The believer does not live according to the customs or conduct of this present age. He knows that the world and its pleasures and allurements no longer should control him. Christians are not to love the world nor the things that are in the world (1 Jn. 2:15). By seeking to guard against the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, the believer does not expect to gain merit with God in a legalistic fashion. Rather, he simply wants to please God. His goal should be Christ-likeness which, very simply put, involves a life of righteousness (1 Jn. 3:7) or holiness (1 Pet. 1:16).

3. The Principles of Separation

The New Testament contains numerous positive and negative commandments. These clear commandments help us through the moral mine field of this world. After all, God cautions us that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 Jn. 5:19). Satan is its God (2 Cor. 4:4). No wonder James warns his readers of collusion with the world system (James 4:4).

Most commandments of the New Testament are clear enough. Positively, the believer should do good unto all men, especially to other believers (Gal. 6:10). Negatively, the Christian must not show hospitality to false teachers (2 Jn. 9–11). However, there are also principles, rules, and standards in the New Testament which the believer can apply to doubtful situations and which frequently lead to separation from certain questionable practices or activities. There are a number of tests available.

1) The test of expediency: Is it a weight? (Heb. 12:1).

The believer lays aside every weight that would hinder his race.

2) The test of enslavement: Is it a habit? (1 Cor. 6:12).

Lawful things can become wrong when they enslave the individual.

3) The test of example: Is it a stumbling stone? (1 Cor. 8:13).

In morally indifferent matters the believer’s love for his brother prompts him to curtail his liberty.

4) The test of evangelism: Is it winsome? (Col. 4:5; 1 Cor. 10:32).

The believer is encouraged to act wisely toward the unbeliever, avoiding behavior that would hinder his witness.

5) The test of exaltation: Is it glorifying? (1 Cor. 10:31).

This is the all-inclusive test for the believer’s conduct. Does it glorify God?

To glorify God is to display any or all of His attributes. Is this the primary concern in our actions? We sing, “More like the Master, I would ever be” and “Earthly pleasures vainly call me, I would be like Jesus.” If we are to be more like the Savior then we must be less like the world. The sincere saint will

thus separate from certain practices, not because of any legalistic constraint but because of a loving concern for his Savior's glory.

In all the situations of life the believer ultimately seeks to glorify the Savior, not himself. He obeys, not because he seeks to earn favor with God, but because he has been blessed by God.

In addition to the five tests to be applied to matters concerning which no clear positive or negative commandments are given, there is a six-fold standard given by the Apostle Paul in Phil. 4:8 which can be applied. Only those things should be considered and acted upon which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of a good report. Only virtuous and praiseworthy things are to be pursued.

On the one hand, the believer avoids contamination by the world, and, on the other hand, he concentrates on pleasing God. In light of the tests and standards laid down for New Testament believers, consistency necessitates that we apply these maxims to various activities so very popular in our society. When the administration of FBBC&TS prohibits our students to use alcohol, attend the movie theater, or participate in dancing, gambling, and similar amusements, it is not for the sake of raising some legalistic standard.

We at FBBC&TS believe that it is best to draw as close to God as possible and separate as far away from the world as possible, not for the sake of enhancing our spirituality but because the love of Christ constrains us to be more and more like Him and thus less and less like the world.