

What is Separation



*A Collection of sermons preached by
W. E. Best*

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Spring Assembly of Christ

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October 2014

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What is Separation—Part 1

W.E. Best

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial [Beliar, the Devil] or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE, says the Lord. AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me, Says the Lord Almighty” (II Cor. 6:14-18 NASB).

Paul’s personal relationship to Jesus Christ as His slave is true liberty. However, to be a slave to any other person or civil authority is terrible in the abstract. Slavery, taken alone, is a plunge into a dark and cold void. On the other hand, self-surrender to the Son of God is not a plunge into a dark void. It is coming to understand what freedom is in the concrete, the reality of being a Christian who knows the truth which has made him free indeed (John 8:32, 36; I Cor. 7:21-23).

Paul’s relationship to the service of Christ is expressed by the term “set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1 NASB). It is imperative that we investigate Romans 1:1 in order to have a clear understanding of Christian slavery, the effectual call, and separation for the gospel of God. Every Christian is a slave of Christ and has been called by the grace of the Sovereign God. Every Christian is separated unto the gospel which is committed to God’s people and has the responsibility to proclaim it to every creature. According to Acts 22:1-3, Galatians 1:13-17, and Philippians 3:1-14, Paul’s pre-regeneration condition was intellectual, religious, and profitable in the flesh. His illumination and information presupposed his regeneration (Acts 9). Paul’s conversion experience included his embracing Christ’s Lordship, self-surrender to be His slave, being effectually called to be an apostle, and being permanently set apart (perfect passive participle of *aphoridzo*, meaning to separate, set apart, or appoint) for the gospel of God.

All Christians are not called as either extraordinary or ordinary servants of the assemblies, but they are all called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. All Christians without exception are called “saints” (*hagiois*, an adjective, the dative masculine plural of *hagios*, meaning holy, set apart by God, morally pure, or upright). In Romans 1:1, the text states, “Paul, a bond-servant [slave] of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle [*kletos apostolos*]...” (NASB). In Romans 1:7, we have, “To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints [*kletois hagiois*]...” (NASB). Therefore, “saint” is a term which is found only in the plural in the New Testament, except in Philippians 4:21—“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you” (NASB).

The word “saints” is applied to all New Testament believers, not to a select body of the spiritual elite. The Greek adjective hagios is equivalent to the Hebrew word meaning to separate, a holy thing, something sacred, a holy place, or to separate. Christians are saints. Those who are positionally holy are expected to be practically holy. Thus, as soon as we are called saints, we are called to be saintly, to act like the saints of God. The same twofold separation is applied to the entire assembly of Christ. “But you are a CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY” (I Pet. 2:9, 10 NASB).

Paul was separated from all other ruling aims to the ruling aim of God’s message. In some respects, Paul was the least isolated of men, because he was in constant contact with religionists who despised the message that he proclaimed. The dedication of Paul to the message was preordained in God’s eternal purpose. “But when He [God] who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood” (Gal. 1:15, 16 NASB).

Paul was related personally, officially, and dedicationally to Jesus Christ, His service, and His message which demanded separation. The dedication of Paul to the gospel was preordained in God’s eternal purpose (Gal. 1:15) and revealed at his conversion (Acts 9:15); and the Divine purpose was historically fulfilled at Antioch (Acts 13:2 ff). The Greek verb aphoridzo (set apart, separate, or appoint) may refer to either God’s eternal purpose or His preordination of Paul from eternity to be an apostle or to the separation of Paul to that work by the order of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13). If this disturbs anyone, look at Jeremiah 1:4-10. God’s decree determined the conditions of Jeremiah’s birth and life. These words unfold some great truths for minds that are capable of hearing and understanding (Matt. 11:25-30; I Cor. 2:7-16). There are seven points in the passage in Jeremiah. (1) God knew Jeremiah (1:5). (2) God sanctified (consecrated) him (1:5). (3) God appointed him to be a prophet to the nations (1: 5). (4) God sent him forth (1:7). (5) God commanded him to speak (1:7). (6) God encouraged him (1:8). (7) God spoke through him (1:9).

When God acts, according to a perfect passive participle of aphoridzo that is given in Romans 1:1, His action is characterized by eternity. This can be understood in the same sense as Divine election. The word election does not always refer to the electing decree. It is sometimes used in the sense of the manifestation of that decree (John 15:19; I Pet. 1:1-3). As there is an election unto sanctification which is performed by the gospel, there is a separation unto the gospel by the effectual call of God.

Separation for the gospel of God is internal. Paul had been effectually called to a particular ministry. Every Christian cannot be personally set apart to either extraordinary or ordinary service, but every Christian has been set apart for the message of Jesus Christ and is responsible for proclaiming that message. Separation “for” something

means automatic separation “from” something. Separation for Dallas is impossible without separation from Houston. Too many religionists are trying to separate themselves from the things of the world who have never been separated for Jesus Christ by the grace of the Sovereign God. On the other hand, there are other religionists who boast of their separation for Christ by Divine election and the effectual call who are without the manifestation of practical holiness in their lives.

Separation comes from the Greek verb *aphoridzo*, which contains our English idea to mark off by boundaries, to mark off for oneself. It contains our English idea of a horizon. Paul’s pre-salvation days had been circumscribed by the circle of Judaism. Paul’s salvation in Christ had given him a new horizon, because he had been lifted out of the circle of Judaism into the limitless horizon of Christianity (Phil. 3). The extent of the horizon may vary between one believer and another believer, but that is because it takes time to go from children, to young men, and to fathers (I John 2:13, 14). We are born as babies in Christ. In I John 2, the Bible divides all Christians into little children, young men, and fathers. When one truth is learned, it opens up one’s vision to other unexplored horizons.

Separation is not only internal, but it is also external. God’s separation of the elect by grace results in a separation which will continue throughout the lives of His chosen ones in time. “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever” (I John 2:12-17 NASB). In verse 16, each section represents each division of maturity that is mentioned. (1) “Lust of the flesh” refers to the “children” days. (2) “Lust of the eyes” refers to “young men.” (3) “Pride of life” represents the older people.

The once-for-all Cross of Jesus Christ in a conversion experience and the daily cross of progressive sanctification are an inexhaustible paradox. We have in conversion (not regeneration) a true and total self-denial; and in progressive sanctification, we have a daily need of self-crucifixion. The once-for-all Cross life is not an attainment, but it is a life-long attitude. It is not a goal, but it is a way of life. Paul did not live and die with the sheep under his care, but he died and lived with them. Paul said to the Corinthians, “I do not speak to condemn you; for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together” (II Cor. 7:3 NASB). How many ministers are willing to do this? Paul said this even in the face of criticism by some of the Corinthians. This principle is for all saints.

Separated for the gospel brings the elect who have been regenerated into the light of the Cross, not to be straightened out but Crossed out. The message of the Cross contradicts our wills, affections, wisdom, pride and selves. The most joyous moment in the life of the bride should be when she loses her name and self-dependence at the marriage altar, taking her husband's name and merging her life into his. Furthermore, the most blissful moment in the life of the regenerated person is when he renounces his right to self-ownership and begins to reckon himself dead to sin, to self, and to the world through the Cross of Christ.

Applied truth is truth that has been learned. If you have not applied truth, you have not learned it. Christ said, "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17 NASB). Truth stored in the mind is no different from the mental concept of truth which Satan possesses. Divine truth is intimately connected with the disposition of the mind of the Christian, and the results are twofold: (1) a desire to know God's will—"And so I sent to you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord" (Acts 10:33 NASB); and (2) a determination to do God's will (John 7:17). To speak from a mental concept of truth is to speak from the neck up, but to speak from applied truth is to speak from the heart.

The object of true knowledge is to look at doctrine as being one correlated whole. Therefore, Christians must be careful about separating the doctrinal from the practical. Christ's doctrine means His teaching embraced everything He taught. Christ's doctrine is one correlated whole in contrast to the doctrines of men. Concerning the Pharisees, Christ said, "THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN" (Matt. 15:8, 9 NASB). Paul warned, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron" (I Tim. 4:1, 2 NASB). The precepts of men are diverse and conflicting, and that is why Scripture warns about being "carried away by varied and strange teachings" (Heb. 13:9 NASB) and "doctrines of demons" (I Tim. 4:1 NASB).

Spiritual knowledge does not come through the intellect of the natural man and then reach the heart. That does away with "easy-believism." An unregenerated person cannot help himself. He has to be quickened by the Holy Spirit in regeneration and given faith and the ability to comprehend and understand truth when he hears it. An unregenerated person can only understand truth historically, not for the satisfaction of his heart. True knowledge comes through the renewed heart in regeneration and gives assurance to the intellect. Therefore, Christ's teaching comes not through natural reasoning, but it comes through the exercise of faith which is God's gift in regeneration. Scripture says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand..." (Heb. 11:1-3a NASB). It is only by faith that we understand, and the faith itself is the gift of God. No unregenerated person has that faith.

There is a wide difference between supposing and knowing. Read I Corinthians 2:8-16. "Shall (will) know" is not to simply have an opinion. The universe is governed by laws. By submission to them one makes them his own. Obey those of the body such as temperance and chastity, and you will experience better physical health. Obey the laws of the mind, such as Philippians 4:8 and 9, and you will experience better mental health. Therefore, when the believer obeys the laws of his spiritual being, he will learn that the spiritual life has its rewards. In every department of knowledge, there is an appointed "member" of the body for the discovery of specific truths. In the world of sense, we have the intellect. In the world of the spiritual, we have an obedient faith.

Diversity of views arises from the people who hear or read the Scriptures, but they do not come from the Scriptures themselves. Scripture means one thing to an unrenewed mind, and it means something entirely different to a renewed mind. Furthermore, the most obedient Christian has the greatest knowledge of Bible doctrine. Man's mode differs from God's mode. Man says "study" and "consider," but God says "obey." Who can study, consider, and handle the Scriptures correctly? Only a child of God can do this. That means that if the person who says he is the child of God does not make an effort to obey what he has heard and read, he does not have a renewed mind. "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17 NASB). If the Christian does not obey and put into practice what he knows, he does not learn any more until he does obey and practice.

What is Separation—Part 2

W.E. Best

There is no promise belonging to the covenant of grace that does not have influence to excite the Christian to duty. In studying the passage dealing with the subject of separation (II Cor. 6:11-18), Paul could not stop until he said, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 7:1 NASB). Inward separation results in outward separation. The Christian lives in the sphere of the world by a life that comes from a higher sphere. Christ said to His disciples, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18, 19 NASB). A distinction needs to be made here. Notice “I chose you out of the world.” That is Divine election, but it does not refer to the same thing as Ephesians 1:4. There is a distinction between God’s choice of His own—those given to Christ before the foundation of the world—called eternal election (Eph. 1:4), and the choice Christ refers to in speaking to His disciples in John 15:18-19. Here He is speaking of the world of time. The world was not in existence when God chose us in Christ. This choice of Christ’s own in time out of the world system is because of the eternal choice of us. There are a number of references in the New Testament that do not refer to eternal election, but to God’s actual pulling out, regenerating, and giving life to those that He gave to Christ eternally before the foundation of the world.

Separation is an unchanging principle. God’s people must not only avoid sin, but also the causes and occasions of sin. Separation is to the ministry of the word of God what sanitation and sterilization are to surgery. Both Jeremiah and Paul had intense affection for the heritage of Jehovah. They were both Jews. Jeremiah said, “Oh, that my head were waters, And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people! O that I had in the desert A wayfarers’ lodging place; That I might leave my people, And go from them! For all of them are adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongue like their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land; For they proceed from evil to evil, And they do not know Me, declares the Lord” (Jer. 9:1-3 NASB). Paul had a similar experience with national Israel. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:1-4 NASB). The faithfulness of both Jeremiah and Paul demanded that they both walk apart from Israel as they testified against them.

There is a great lesson in Jeremiah’s prayer and God’s answer in Jeremiah 15:15-21—“Thou who knowest, O LORD, Remember me, take notice of me, And take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do not, in view of Thy patience, take me away; Know that for Thy sake I endure reproach. Thy words were found and I ate them, And Thy words

became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts. I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers, Nor did I exult. Because of Thy hand upon me I sat alone, For Thou didst fill me with indignation. Why has my pain been perpetual And my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Wilt Thou indeed be to me like a deceptive stream With water that is unreliable? Therefore, thus says the LORD, If you return, then I will restore you—Before me you will stand; And if you extract the precious from the worthless, You will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you, But as for you, you must not turn to them. Then I will make you to this people A fortified wall of bronze; And though they fight against you, They will not prevail over you; For I am with you to save you And deliver you, declares the LORD. So I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grasp of the violent” (NASB). Paul had similar experiences subsequent to Christ’s first advent. (See Acts 17; 22; 24; II Cor. 10; 11; II Tim. 4.)

God never endorsed His servants during Biblical times to stay in an unscriptural system in order to teach some. It is not necessary to become affiliated with carnal, religious institutions in order to either preach or serve. This refutes an error that has been perpetuated by the prince of deceivers himself. Christians have no business being a part of such institutions. Which is more important, full obedience to God or a larger sphere of service to man? For the Christian, there will be either a limited message if he compromises or a limited fellowship if he does not compromise. In every age, God has called His people to a life of separation—

1. God told Abraham to get out of his country and from his people (Gen. 12).
2. God told Israel to get out of Egypt (Ex. 12-14).
3. John the Baptist was separated from organized Judaism (Matt. 3; 14).
4. Christ led His sheep out of Judaism (John 10).
5. Peter told the converts at Pentecost to “Be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40).
6. The writer of Hebrews said, “...let us go out to Him outside the camp” (Heb. 13:13 NASB).
7. The call of God shall go forth saying, “Come out of her [religious Babylon—a world church made up of everything you can think of] my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4 NASB). (See Rom. 16:17; II Thess. 3:14; I Tim. 6:3-5; II Tim. 2:14-21; 3:5; II John 9-11.)

Inward separation results in outward separation. God does not lead His people into false institutions with the idea of winning some to Christ. It is never right to do wrong in order to do what one thinks is right. Paul said, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do

not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete” (II Cor. 10:3-6 NASB).

The ability to think is man’s great distinction. Thought is the instrument of man’s work. Thought determines the man. Thought arrests the attention, awakens the feeling, inflames the passions, subdues the desires, and commands action. Therefore, thoughts unled will be to a man what winds and waves are to a sailboat without a rudder—a driving and destructive force. The Christian desires to have his thoughts brought into captivity “to the obedience of Christ.”

Paul also said, “For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding” (II Cor. 10:12 NASB). So balloon-like is the soul when it is filled with earthly vanities, it swells with pride. The apostle concluded II Corinthians 10 by saying, “but HE WHO BOASTS, LET HIM BOAST IN THE LORD. For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends” (II Cor. 10:17, 18 NASB). Paul was not anxious for a number of converts he could count as his own. His chief concern was for those whom he could present as chaste virgins to Christ (II Cor. 11:1-4). To the true minister, Jesus Christ is sufficient for the chosen sinner’s every need—

1. Christ is the Way. Without Him, men are like Cain who was a murderer and vagabond.
2. Christ is the Truth. Without Him, men are liars, like the devil.
3. Christ is the Life. Without Him, men are dead in trespasses and sins.
4. Christ is the Light. Without Him, men are in darkness because they are darkness.
5. Christ is the Vine. Without Him, men are withered branches prepared for the fire.
6. Christ is the Resurrection. Without Him, men cannot be raised from spiritual death, but they will stand before the Great White Throne judgment.
7. Christ is the Alpha and Omega. Without Him, as the Author and Finisher of their faith, men will not experience the beginning of good nor the end of misery.

Paul used the term “bound together”—unequally yoked or mismatched—in II Corinthians 6:14 to introduce his strong teaching on the subject of separation. The Greek verb heterozugeo is used by Paul only in this verse. It is a compound verb made up of heteros, an adjective meaning other, another, different, foreign, or strange. The verb stem is zugeo, to be unequally yoked or to be mismatched. This unusual

compound word has a cognate form in the law which forbids the breeding of hybrid animals. The Lord spoke to Moses, “You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together” (Lev. 19:19 NASB). God established a good, physical order in the world. Therefore, it is not to be disfigured by mixing the species. It is another form of that law which forbids the yoking of an ox and an ass together (Deut. 22:10).

The common application of “Do not be bound together with unbelievers” is used when discussing the marriage of Christians with non-Christians. However, the text, in the light of the immediate context, is not to be confused by the association of its different kinds. Christians are to have no compromising connection with anything in the world which is alien to God. The Christian can try to be as loving and conciliatory as possible without compromise, but as long as the world remains “in the power of the evil one” (I John 5:19), he cannot maintain any integrity without a continual attitude of unbroken protest. There will always be people and things to which the Christian has to say, “No!” Furthermore, the Christian must not be driven out, but he must voluntarily break away from all ties that do not honor God. There is an unequal yoke between sheep and goats. The line of demarcation is broad and conspicuous because it is between (1) righteousness and unrighteousness, (2) light and darkness, (3) Christ and Satan, (4) faith and infidelity, and (5) the Temple of God and the temple of idols. These five things are mentioned in the light of II Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

The remaining verses of II Corinthians 6 continue to emphasize the subject of separation which is the fruit of grace. Grace not only saves (vv. 4-10), but it grows (vv. 11-13) and separates (vv. 14-7:1). God chose the elect to be holy. “Just as He [God the Father] chose us in Him [God the Son] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:4-6 NASB).

Imperfect Christians are admonished to cleanse themselves “...from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 7:1 NASB). Paul is not dealing with position, but he is referring to condition. Position is the work of the sovereign God in grace (Heb. 10:10-14). No one can perfect what is already perfected. Nothing can be added to or nothing can be taken from that which is perfected before God. However, when it comes to the filthiness of the flesh and spirit, the Christian is faced with the imperfection of his condition before God. The believer who understands his justification before God, and views his life against the backdrop of Divine grace, will gain a deeper knowledge of his own sinfulness.

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God” is not the same as “And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground...” (Matt. 25:25 NASB). The man in the parable who had received one talent said, “Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where

you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed” (Matt. 25:24 NASB). A person’s thinking colors his living, and his living manifests his character.

The man in the parable was afraid of God, and he brought nothing to perfection. Paul sought to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Is it the same thing “to be afraid of God” and “to fear God”? No. The man in the parable thought God was “a hard man.” All the man in the parable could think about was God’s severity. Is God severe? No. Is severity an element of His character? Yes. The man was afraid because of sin. On the other hand, Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Gal. 2:20 NASB). Was Paul afraid of God? No. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. The fear of God is the God-begotten fear of sin. “I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me” (Jer. 32:40 NASB). The unfailing test of a true believer is the fact he is always aiming after higher attainments in the Christian life.

Conversion is genuine when one hates sin from the heart. It is not that he hates some sin, but he hates all sin. “...Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23 NASB). If our hatred is the result of Divine grace, we hate all evil—in ourselves first, and then in others. True hatred hates all evil in a just proportion. There can be no God-likeness in us unless we love what God loves and hate what God hates. Two things contrary to each other cannot be loved at the same time. Perfecting holiness in reverential fear is not wanting to displease God. This is not a slavish fear that says, “You are hard, God.” God is not severe, but severity is part of God’s character. He is severe with everything that He hates.

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October 2014