

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (28-6-1998 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
Additional Reading: John 17:13-19

Introduction

The theme of separation is very prominent in the Old Testament in regard to Israel, and in the New Testament in regard to the Christian church. It is stressed constantly as essential to serve God aright and remain spiritually healthy and effective in the world. Yet it is a word which has almost entirely dropped out of the Christian vocabulary. In some quarters, it is the cause of mockery and total rejection. Perhaps this is why Christian witness is so anaemic and ineffective. We make little impact because there is little difference. So why bother to be a Christian?

Some Christians want to be like the world as much as possible in order to win them. But it does not work that way. However, when there is a clear difference, the world may criticize, but it is aware of the difference and expects us to be different. Need to think seriously again. In the past, our approach was not entirely satisfactory. Need to be consistent and thorough in the matter. In the past there were a list of things Christians did not do, places they did not go, habits they did not indulge. There was also the realization that worldliness was not just about externals, but was an inward thing, e.g. it is possible to be worldly in attitude to clothes, possessions and money. Also the realization that what may be a stumbling block for one Christian may not be the same for another. Though we may rethink the issues, the main thing is to recognise the principle of separation. Essential to observe that if we are going to please God and maintain spiritual health.

We will consider the world as it is. It is certainly not the day to experiment to see how near we can get to the world. If we belong to Christ, we cannot be one with the world that rejected and continues to reject Him. We shall see what separation entails, the blessings it brings and the challenge it poses.

Definition of separation from the world

First of all we need to be clear about what separation is *not*. This needs to be cleared up to avoid misunderstanding. Beware of zeal not according to knowledge.

Separation does not mean we normally have to give up our callings, trades and business in the world. **Let every man remain in the same calling in which he was called** (1 Corinthians 7:20). **If any one will not work, neither will he eat** (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Cornelius continued as a centurion, Luke as a physician. Of course a trade that is connected with evil has to be given up, e.g. some occupations are connected with heathen religion.

An example from the Victorian era – F.N.Charrington, heir to a large brewing firm, was converted on the Continent after reading John 3, through the influence of a friend. One day he was on his way to help in a school for poor children, when he passed by a public house. He witnessed a poor woman with several children round her, calling to her husband inside the pub for money for bread. The man came out, looked at her,

felled her to the ground with one blow, and she lay in the gutter. Charrington looked up at the name of the pub, and saw his own name “Charrington” in huge letters, as the brewer owning the pub. He saw his responsibility for many such cases of misery and brutality. He said to himself, in reference to the drunkard, “Well, you knocked your wife down into the gutter, and with the same blow you have knocked me out of the brewery business.” He gave up one and a quarter million pounds, £1000 per week, a huge sum in those days, for the sake of his conscience.

So all occupations connected with evil are to be given up. But normally we are to retain our work on becoming Christians.

Separation from the world does not mean Christians have to have no contact with the unconverted at all. Christ and His disciples went to feast in the Pharisees house, and went to a marriage feast. They used these contacts for doing good. So may we.

Separation from the world does not mean we take no interest in the affairs of this life – culture, science, and politics. These are gifts from God to enable us to live a full life and exercise the natural gifts given to us. We have a duty to use our gifts and privileges for the good of others. Paul used his advantages as a Roman for the good of others. Paul knew and quoted heathen writers and poets. He knew the laws, customs and games of the world. Our Christian life is meant to be whole, complete, and our physical, mental and spiritual needs must be met.

Separation from the world does not mean we should be eccentric and peculiar in dress, manners and voice. Nor does it mean we have to be monks or hermits, shut up in solitude. **My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one** (John 17:15). The early Christians lived ordinary lives, but their lives were graced with patience, purity and direction. **Whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things** (Philippians 4:8). They were not to be sour, gloomy or unpleasant.

True separation involves observing basic principles enabling us to walk with God and live lives which honour Him. The application will vary from individual to individual, and we are not to judge, but to err on the side of safety. Do not be guided by the world’s standards of right and wrong. **Do not love the world or anything in the world.... For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world** (1 John 2:15,16). **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world** (Romans 12:2). **Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?** (James 4:4). The Bible uses the contrasts of light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness, the Temple of the Lord and of idols.

The Christian is to be guided by God’s will in his Word. The opinion of others is irrelevant. May have to stand alone – so be it. Beware of a worldly spirit regarding our possessions – car, clothes, business and money. Do not idolize these things, or live for them and boast of them and try to outdo others by them. God is to be our supreme delight.

Our pleasures and distractions, if they are innocent, we should continue to enjoy them with moderation, and use them to help recreate ourselves. They provide necessary

relaxation for mind and body, enabling us to be more fit for Christ's work. But good things are not to take over our lives.

Beware of occupations and pastimes which can lead others into sin. May not be a problem for us, but our example counts. Our participation may cause others to stumble.

Beware of close, permanent relationships with unconverted people, in business and marriage, though we must be courteous and friendly to all. **Do not be yoked together with unbelievers** (2 Corinthians 6:14). This warning against being unequally yoked occurs several times in the New Testament. The Christian should marry only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39). Obviously if someone is converted when they are already in a marriage to a non-believer, they must stay unless the other partner walks out (1 Corinthians 7:10-15). **Do not plough with an ox and a donkey together** (Deuteronomy 22:10) – no more can a husband and wife pull together if they have different goals and interests and driving power.

Failure to observe this rule of separation causes so many spiritual disasters in the Christian world. Our testimony has gone, our witness is blunted, and the result is so much unhappiness. "Worldliness" is whatever comes between the Christian and God. The great test to put to whatever we do – will it please God? Is it in His will? Will it help me in my walk and service for Him? Will it spoil my appetite for spiritual things?

The blessings which follow separation

Separation is not just negative, but has very positive results. Just like health and surgery – the instruments are separated and sterilized to be free from infection, so that they can be useful for healing and cure. Just like with marriage – forsaking all others for the sake of the one person – the only way to enjoy married love, commitment and joy.

Spiritually speaking, to be separated from the world for fellowship with God brings the enjoyment of His blessing and presence. Be sure to fill your life with these blessings after you have separated yourself from the world – beware of the empty house which, after the demons were expelled, was seized by worse demons (Matthew 12:43-45). So separate yourself from the world for positive blessing. **I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters** (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

God not only wants to be in our lives, but to be free to go where He wants and do what He wants. He wants the run of the place, to do what He likes with the lives He possesses, and use them as He pleases. He wants to establish warm family relationship as our Father. To be a Christian is to be a member of a great family, to enjoy the Father's wealth, be led by the Father's wisdom and directed by the Father's will. There is close intimacy in our personal dealings with God when we are separated unto Him.

We have the prospect of a life in which the Lord is increasingly real. We do more and more of His perfect will, and He reveals more and more of His grace and love. This kind of relationship with God is a life of continual discovery and constant progress. It ends with enjoying His presence forever in heaven.

Is that your experience of the Christian life? If not, there must be something between you and God. The saddest thing is a Christian who has stopped growing, and can only look back on past experience of blessing, and cannot say what God means to him now.

Where has God a controversy with you? At what point have you not separated from the world and its spirit? Is there a habit that has come between you and God, or an act of disobedience? Is it pride of grace, place, race or face? Does someone or something else occupy the throne of your life?

The challenge to be separate

Since we have these promises let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1). Let us make a clean-cut decisive break from sin, and spend our lives striving towards holiness, a life of separation unto God. Not just once a week, but continually. Get rid of any defilement which brings coldness towards God and His people and His house, and deeper defilement which affects our will and mars our conscience.

Then give selves over to God that His will might be done in, through and for us. Do it all in a spirit of reverence and awe for the living God. Don't just compare yourself with others, but with the eyes of God in whose sight the very heavens are unclean.

What kind of Christian are you? Half-hearted? One foot in God's camp and one foot in the world's? Are you too close to God to be happy in the world, yet too close to the world to be happy in God? If so, you will never be a satisfied and happy Christian. The price of fullness and abundance of life is clean-cut total separation to God.

The whole-hearted Christian who has made this total separation to God is the happiest, most satisfied and most fulfilled. God does not bless disobedience. Some want to saw off the edges and take a few short cuts and avoid self-denial, but that cannot be done.

Is God speaking to your conscience? Is the Lord putting His finger on something in your life? Is there something hindering your fellowship with the Lord and stopping you from being used by Him? Let Him have His way. It could make you unpopular, be costly, bring you ridicule, and some may take offence. Are you ready for that?

Dr Graham Scroggie was miserable and unsettled in his first church, so decided to quit the ministry and go back into business. He went to see Dr Harry Gratton Guinness. He opened his heart to him and told him of his failure. Scroggie confessed he was preaching a message which was just theory for he had not experienced the truth of it. He was sick in body, mind and heart. He quoted the line, "Grace is there your every debt to pay." Then Guinness asked the question, "Have you ever

surrendered yourself to God – body, soul and spirit?” “I do not know that I have” was Scroggie’s reply. “You would know if you had”, said Guinness. Scroggie returned to his home in Epping Forest and then he let go, and let God. His life was never the same again.

Conclusion

The call goes out to be separated from the world. It is a call to determined action. There must be real dealings with God, and not just friendly discussions. If we don’t overcome the world, the world will overcome us. Put the case into the Lord’s hands unreservedly. With Him nothing is impossible. He promises that our case is not hopeless, for He alone can do all we ask or think.