

Series: *Biblical Separation*

Title: "Separation: Marriage & Divorce" (Matthew 10:32-39 , 1 Corinthians 7:10-16)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/19/2015

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Today we are continuing to address one of the most difficult challenges that many Christians face: How can a Christian live a life of spiritual separation while living in the same household with unbelievers?

Many Christians face the challenge of living under the same roof with an unbelieving father, mother, sister, brother, wife, husband, or children. But the Word of God gives us clear instructions about how to live a spiritually separated life, even when you are living in the most intimate relationships with unbelievers in your own household. It can be done, and God calls upon us to do it. Scripture shows us that it is a vital part of the plan of God for a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ to live such a life before unbelieving family members.

### **Confessing Christ Before Men**

In our last message, we saw that the Lord Jesus addressed this issue very directly in the 10th chapter of Matthew. Before we move on to another vital passage on this question today, let me briefly remind you what the Lord says there.

First of all, in Matthew chapter 10 verses 32 and 33 we saw that Jesus declares that "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in Heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in Heaven." And we saw that in the original language of this passage, to confess Christ before men means to think and to speak and to live before men in a way that is in complete agreement with the Lord Jesus Christ. That

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is the meaning of the word "confess" in this passage. This is at the very heart of Biblical separation. The interests and the imperatives of Jesus Christ must come first. We must agree with Christ before the unbelieving, and never deny Christ.

Secondly, we saw that Jesus declared that He did not come into the world to bring absence from conflict. He said, Matthew chapter 10 verse 34, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." Jesus did not come in order to bring absence from conflict. He said, Yes there will be conflict, and that conflict will center upon Me. I myself have come, Jesus said, bringing that conflict into the world. I am the focus of that conflict. It is a conflict between those who are loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are loyal to this present evil world.

And thirdly, we saw that Jesus declared what the effect of that conflict will often be. Jesus said, beginning in Matthew chapter 10 verse 35, that this conflict will often "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be those of his own household."

### **Living With Unbelievers In Love**

How does this apply to you, dear friend? It means that if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are living under the same roof with unbelievers – an unbelieving husband or wife, unbelieving parents, unbelieving children, and so on – your identification with Christ will in itself create conflict. Your obedience to the Word of God will bring conflict even in your own household.

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But we also saw that you must think and speak and act with love. Living a life of separation before unbelievers within your own household does not mean that you should be deliberately difficult to live with. In Romans chapter 12 verse 18 the Holy Spirit commands this: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

But, we also see in Matthew chapter 10 that your position in Christ will require you to make choices. Beginning in verse 37, the Lord Jesus declared, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

Once again, what we are seeing here is that one of the keynotes of Biblical separation is love – self-sacrificial love. You must be willing to sacrifice yourself for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the hope of the salvation of your loved ones who don't believe. Jesus said that "he who loses his life for My sake will find it." And so, dear friends, you may be called upon to make many self-sacrifices for the sake of unbelieving loved ones within your home.

But you must never sacrifice the approval of our Lord Jesus Christ. You must never set yourself against Him by entering into spiritual compromise. This is the test of love. We must love the Lord Jesus Christ above all. As Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or

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daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

### **Building On Christ's Instruction**

But why does the Lord Jesus set this imperative before us? It is because there is hope in living a spiritually separated life before the unbelieving members of your household. There is hope for your unbelieving loved ones. There is hope for them that has to do with your witness before them.

I mentioned at the end of our last message that we find this hope set before us in the Word of God. Please turn with me in your Bible, if you are able to do so, to the book of First Corinthians chapter 7. First Corinthians chapter 7, beginning at verse 10. The Apostle Paul is giving instruction regarding the home, and regarding marriage and divorce.

Now before we look at this passage in some detail, let me call your attention to the words with which the Apostle Paul begins. Notice how he begins at verse 10:

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

But then notice how the Apostle Paul begins verse 12: "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say..." And then the Apostle Paul continues with further instruction.

Now in order to understand the passage we are about to consider, we need to understand why the Apostle Paul begins in this way. Some teachers try to say that

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beginning in verse 12 the Apostle Paul is giving personal instruction that does not necessarily have the stamp of approval of the Lord Jesus Christ upon it. These people try to say that Paul goes beyond what Jesus said and is expressing an opinion, and therefore the verses that follow in this passage, verses 12 through 16, are not necessarily part of the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God.

Dear friends, nothing could be further from the truth. What the Apostle Paul is saying is that he is about to teach Christians *additional* truth from the Holy Spirit on a matter about which the Lord Jesus taught during his ministry on earth. Jesus in the Gospel records taught very specifically about the issues of marriage and divorce. And in verses 10 and 11 the Apostle Paul is reminding the Corinthian believers of that fact. But beginning in verse 12, the Apostle Paul addresses questions that relate to a proper and a fuller understanding of what the Lord Jesus taught. The words that follow, in verses 10 through 16, are indeed part of the inspired Word of God.

We find this pattern many times in the New Testament. In many cases, in the Gospels the Lord Jesus set forth a particular truth in a circumscribed way. And He always did so for a particular purpose. Often, He did it because there was additional truth to be revealed after His death and resurrection.

In John chapter 16, verse 12, the Lord Jesus told His disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." "You cannot bear them now," He said. The word "bear" in this particular case does not have to do with bearing a

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burden. The word in its context has to do with being able to bear something as an emblem. After the resurrection, and after the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the newly formed Christian church, these disciples were able to bear additional teachings from Jesus Himself, and additional teachings communicated through the Holy Spirit. They were able to sustain and to understand and to proclaim the logical outcomes of the things that Jesus had taught in seed-form while He was with them.

The passage we are considering in First Corinthians 7 is just such a case. The Apostle Paul is giving additional instruction to the church having to do with the logical out-workings of Jesus' own teachings in the Gospels concerning marriage and divorce and the family. And so the Apostle Paul says this, First Corinthians chapter 7 beginning at verse 12:

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases.

But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether

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you will save your wife?

### **Christians Are Not To Leave Unsaved Loved Ones**

What principles do we find in this passage that govern the conduct of a believer who is endeavoring to live the spiritually separated life that God has commanded? Let me submit to you that we find three in particular in this passage.

First of all, *spiritual separation, separation from this present evil world and separation unto our holy God, does not mean leaving the unsaved loved ones who may be under your roof.*

Now this is an area in which we need to be careful. We need to make distinctions between that which God commanded for Israel under the Old Covenant and that which He commands for believers under the New Covenant. The principles are always the same. The heart and mind of God, and the holiness of God, never change. But the application of the principle of separation does change in a very specific way as we move from the time of the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant to the time of the Church under the New Covenant.

Under the Old Covenant, God commanded physical separation from the unbelieving in the households of Israel. God commanded that there be no intermarriage between the Israelites and the pagan nations surrounding them. And the people of Israel often paid a heavy price by violating that commandment. Earlier in this series we saw one of the most tragic examples of that in the life of

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King Solomon of Israel. Solomon took hundreds and hundreds of pagan wives, who led him away from loyalty to the one true and living God.

And as we come to the book of Ezra in the Old Testament, when the remnant returned to the land after 70 years of captivity, we find in chapter ten that the returning Jews divorced their pagan wives and separated themselves from their mixed-marriage children.

Why did they do that? They did it because the land to which they were returning was God's special dwelling place. This drastic step was necessary in order that the land to which they were returning might be a holy place for their God to dwell in. This was the long-standing commandment of God, ever since the days in the wilderness.

But under the New Covenant, God does not dwell in any physical land. God does not dwell in a temple made with hands, as He did in those days. In the New Covenant economy, God dwells in every individual believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple of the living God.

Also, under the New Covenant, God commands specific attitudes and steps regarding the spiritual separation of the true Church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ living in this present world. In Second Corinthians chapter 6 beginning at verse 14, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul commands that believers separate themselves from unbelievers. The Holy Spirit commands that there be no fellowship, or concord, or agreement attempted between believers and unbelievers

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within the visible church. Such a thing is impossible, the Holy Spirit tells us through the Apostle Paul.

In the epistle of Second John, in verse 10, believers are commanded not to receive any one, or to even greet anyone, who is an apostate, because, as the Holy Spirit says through John, "He who greets him shares in his evil deeds."

In First Corinthians chapter 5 beginning at verse 9, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul warns the church "not to keep company with sexually immoral people." And Paul makes it clear that he is speaking of anyone who is a professing Christian "who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner." He warns believers "not even to eat with such a person."

But in the very next verse in First Corinthians chapter 5, the Apostle Paul tells us that this commandment applies to those who are *inside* the Church. There is to be this physical separation inside the Church, inside the body of Christ, because there is to be spiritual separation within the body. The Holy Spirit does not command such separation outside the Church. In First Corinthians chapter 5 verse 12, we are told that "those who are outside God judges." But believers are to make these kinds of judgments regarding separation *within* the church.

But under the New Covenant, as we read here in First Corinthians chapter 7, God does not command believers to physically separate from unbelievers who are living under the same roof. No, Paul says under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, First Corinthians chapter 7 verse 12:

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If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

And in verse 15, the Holy Spirit states that if anyone is going to physically separate, let it be the unbeliever. The unbeliever has that liberty, that right. But the believer does not have that liberty. And further on in First Corinthians chapter 7, the Spirit through the Apostle Paul states the principle not only for believers in a marriage relationship with an unbeliever, but believers in other kinds of relationships and conditions.

In First Corinthians chapter 7 verse 24 we read this: "Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called." If you became a believer in Christ while married to an unbeliever, or even if you as a believer, contrary to God's command, entered into a marriage relationship with an unbeliever – in any such cases, "let each one remain with God in that state."

Now this does not mean that a believing individual should stay in a household in which the unbelieving spouse is physically violent, or the lives of the children may be in danger. Obviously we need to exercise wisdom. But even under other very difficult conditions, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul is saying that if the unbelieving spouse is willing to remain in the relationship, then the believing spouse should not physically separate.

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## **Living With Unsaved Loved Ones: Part of God's Plan**

And why is this? This brings us to the 2nd principle that we find in this passage: *It is often part of God's plan for a Christian to live under the same roof, in the same household, with unbelievers in the most intimate of human relationships.* Notice First Corinthians chapter 7 verse 14:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

So what is the Holy Spirit saying through the Apostle Paul? Are believers to separate from their unbelieving spouses and their unbelieving children, as they were to do under the Old Covenant, as we find in Ezra? The answer is no. The Holy Spirit through Paul is instructing New Covenant believers not to do so.

He is telling them that under the New Covenant believers should stay with unbelieving spouses, and with unbelieving children, and that both the unbelieving spouse and the children of the mixed marriage are in a special set-apart relationship in the eyes of God. The unbelieving husband is "sanctified" or set apart into that relationship by the presence of the believing wife. The unbelieving wife is "sanctified" or set apart into that special relationship by the presence of the believing husband. And Paul goes on to say that the children of that relationship between a believing spouse and an unbelieving spouse are also set apart in a special relationship because of the presence of one believing parent.

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And what is that special relationship? That special relationship has to do with the privileges of the influence of the Word of God and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ within the home upon the unbelieving spouse and upon the children of this mixed marriage between a believer and an unbeliever.

*And in this special relationship there is hope for the salvation of the unsaved members of the household.* That is the third principle that we find in this passage. This is the great reason why God instructs believers to remain in a household with unbelievers, and to live a separated, Christ-honoring life before those unsaved loved ones.

Dear friend, if you are in this situation, First Corinthians chapter 7 is telling you that this is your calling from God. How are you to deal with the challenges and the difficulties that such a calling presents? How are you to live before your unsaved loved ones in the hope that they may be saved? How are you to deal with specific situations? The Lord willing that will be our focus as we continue this series in our next broadcast.

#### **About the Broadcast**

***The Scripture-Driven Church*** airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to obey Christ's Great Commission: preaching the Gospel to all, and equipping believers in Christ to live every area of life by the sole authority of Scripture, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

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