

2 CORINTHIANS 6

Whatever Happened to Christian Separation?

Student Guides

Daily Bible Reading

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Famed Christian author, A.W. Tozer, once said, "Most Christians are not joyful persons because they are not holy persons, and they are not holy persons because they are not filled with the Holy Spirit, and they are not filled with the Holy Spirit because they are not separated persons." For Tozer, the key to usefulness in God's service was to be separated. He dubbed it the "separated person." Few Christian bodies take note of Biblical holiness. Fewer still practice what once was common, Christian separation.

By separation, they did not understand believers were to be isolated from the world. Instead, it was emphasized believers were not to be contaminated by the world. In other words, the Christian's moral integrity would not be compromised through any contact with worldly lifestyles.

1. Christian Separation Involves a Principle to be Upheld (vv.1-13)

Becoming a Christian is more than verbally proclaiming Jesus is one's Savior. Rather, becoming a Christian means Jesus is one's Lord. And, Jesus as Lord means Jesus is Lord over one's entire life. Christian separation is the inevitable result of the Lordship of Christ. We are committed to the principle of separation (vv. 1-4a).

- A. *Attitude of humility and grace (vv. 1-4a)* - Great men are rarely found bragging about either accomplishments or position. Instead they have a basic, undeniable humility about them. Ministry is about receiving God's grace.
- B. *Adversities of our ministry (vv. 4b-5)* - Being a believer will not satisfy all our desires or solve all our problems. In fact Paul becomes intense, cataloging one difficulty after another: afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, and labors among others. Looking closely at the list will reap distinctions between difficulties that are common, difficulties specifically physical, and difficulties within the vocational life.
- C. *Attributes of our ministry (vv. 6-7)* - As he cataloged afflictions we endure, he also catalogues attributes we exemplify. Among others he lists pureness, knowledge, long-suffering, kindness, and love, thus representing moral as well as emotional attributes.
- D. *Assessment (vv. 8-10)* - For Paul, assessment of our ministry covered several spheres including social, physical, and emotional. No believer's life contains locked rooms where the Lordship of Christ lacks authority.

2. Christian Separation Involves a Prohibition to be Understood (vv. 14-16)

Christian separation not only involves standing on the Lordship principle, Christian separation also observes specific boundaries (vv. 15-16). Paul argues, Christian separation is the most *sensible* thing to do. At this juncture, the Apostle appeals to our innate sense of logic by contrasting righteousness with unrighteousness, light with darkness, Christ with Belial, and believers with unbelievers.

In addition, Christian separation is the most *desirable* thing to do (v. 16). Christians are God's temple (cp. 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19; Eph. 2:22). Being a Jew and a former Pharisee, a more radical statement Paul could not make. Nevertheless, he affirms God dwells *in* them and walks *in* them!

In the end, love creates the desire for separation. Christian separation is not about fear of the world. Nor is it about superstitious notions that Christians must live in a bubble apart from the world. Instead, Christian separation is about loving Jesus with all one's heart. Being separate is about denying one's self, taking up a cross and following hard after Christ.

3. Christian Separation Involves a Promise to be Underscored (v. 17)

Already we have noted God's promise to be among His people, even *in* His people (v. 16). Paul further affirms the believer's confidence that God is with him or her every step of the process (v. 17). To obey God's call is to receive God's promise. In fact, obedience results in God responding, "I will receive you." So just what does it mean for God to receive us?

First, it means we have the Father's favor. When God receives us, He favors us. Our lives are showered with grace. We share His life. We experience His love. We receive His gifts. We join His eternal Kingdom. Separation means we enter into His love, living His life goals for us rather than our own.

Second, God's reception means we have the Father's fellowship. God says to those whom He receives, He will be, "a Father unto you" (v. 18). Is there a more blessed promise in the Word of God? God will be our Father! More than anything a good Father desires the best for his children. He showers them with gifts. He meets their every need. He protects them from stranger and enemy alike. He covers them with shelter and nurses them when sick. His bank account is at their disposal when their lives are threatened. Whatever it takes, he will supply.

4. Christian Separation Involves a Process to be Undertaken (v. 18)

Finally, even though Christian separation is a stated *principle*—the principle of Jesus' Lordship over our lives — upon which we stand, we must not fail to grasp that Christian separation is also a *process* to be undertaken on a daily basis. In other words, Christian separation is synonymous with *sanctification* (cp. 1 Cor. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:3). In fact, as one reads the entire sixth chapter, separation's process is a thread interwoven throughout. However, the best summary statement is found in the first verse of chapter 7. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (7:1). For no better summary of Christian separation could we hope. Paul instructs us as to precisely how separation works.

First, there is a negative side to separation. Paul makes the negative clear as he focuses on the call to "cleanse ourselves." Additionally, the "cleansing" is *positional* in nature. In other words, "cleansing" is something God does (cp. Rev. 1:5). God's Spirit because of Christ's shed blood washes us sparkling clean from dirty guilt, dingy shame, and deplorable sin. On the other hand, "cleansing" is also *practical* in nature. Our *position* is in Christ; God put us there. However, our *condition* is *practical*, meaning there is activity we pursue (cp. James 1:27). While regeneration is *passive*—God alone does the regenerating—sanctification is *active*. We pursue good works. Indeed elsewhere Paul makes it clear performing good works is part of the built-in design of being a Christian. Note well the Apostles' words, "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Good works are part of the design of being a Christian. We must not get the impression, however, that good works in any way save us.

Yet good works are designed in God's plan of redemption. An old preacher once said, "Faith is the root of our salvation, and good works is the fruit of our salvation. Never confuse the two." Good works flow naturally from genuine faith. We perform good work not to be saved; rather we perform good works because we are saved! And, performing good works is simply another way of practicing Christian separation.