



SEPARATION—is it *really* necessary today?

This modern age is one of ecumenical activity and spiritual compromise. The old truths of the Word of God have been jettisoned in order to maintain a false and unscriptural unity in professing Christendom. Many who profess to belong to Christ are caught up in this wicked movement. Most are involved because they are ignorant of what the Bible has to say about such things.

What does the Bible say about ecclesiastical separation?

One example of Biblical teaching on separation is found in Hebrews 13:12-13 *Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood; suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*

The language used here would have been very plain to those to whom the Apostle wrote. They were Hebrews, well versed in the Law and its ceremonies. This meant that the writer did not have to make a full statement of his line of reasoning. His readers could easily follow his arguments even though they may appear a little cryptic to modern readers. In the context Paul presents Christ as the fulfillment of the Levitical sin offering and draws from his teaching on the subject this exhortation to separate.

One key element of the sin offering was that the carcass of the sacrifice was not offered on the altar but was *burned without the camp* verse 11. The symbolic truth here is that the sin bearer was so abhorrent and unclean because of the transfer of sin to it that it could no longer be tolerated but must be expelled from the camp or from the city. In agreement with this Old Testament symbol *Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood; suffered without the gate* (v12). Christ took our sins upon Him and so — although a sinless sacrifice, became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). He took the place of the unclean outcast and was expelled from the presence of men and even from God the Father! (Matthew 27:46) Just as He was separated as the sin-bearer so believers are exhorted to follow Christ in the path of separation.

SCRIPTURAL SEPARATION IS “UNTO HIM”.

Separation is not merely isolation and a withdrawing from others. It is not an end in itself but is rather a means to an end. The word order is important here. **FIRST**, we are to go... unto Him and **SECOND**, we are to leave the camp (v13). Our first objective is not simply separation — it is rather to be with Christ. Being with Christ will, however, necessitate separation. If our first priority is right then every other aspect of separation will follow in due order.

Scriptural separation means going to take a stand with Christ — specifically identifying with Him in His work of redemption. This is what the Scripture calls *separated unto the Gospel* (Romans 1:1). The thought here is clearly that there is a separation to Christ crucified — Christ the sufferer for sin. The sin offering taught the doctrine of God's wrath on sin, the necessity of one to take the sinner's place, to be identified as an unclean sinner and suffer the punishment due to sin if sinners were to be forgiven. If we are to separate unto Christ



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then these are the doctrines that we must embrace. Scriptural separation is rallying around the gospel banner of salvation by faith in Christ's vicarious work as Redeemer. Wherever the doctrines of the Cross are under-emphasized, set aside or denied outright, the people of God have a clear duty to stand with Christ. That duty will mean opposing modernistic trends as they are brought into the Church and if such opposition is unsuccessful or impossible then their duty is to separate from such a Church.

In the context of Paul's argument, *the camp* will refer to those in Israel who still held to the Mosaic Law. They engaged in religious ritual (v9, 10) but had rejected Christ. There is an obvious reference to all who reject Christ but especially to those religious Christ rejecters. They held to divers and strange doctrines (v9) and not the doctrine of the Cross. In order to be with Christ there must be a separation from the camp of all those who either deny outright the doctrine of Christ's atonement or adopt a compromised view of Christ's saving work. *The camp* will come between us and Christ. We cannot take a stand for Him and remain inside! He is outside and to be with Him we must be outside as well.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said; I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you (II Corinthians 6:14-18).

SEPARATION IS THE DUTY OF EVERY BELIEVER.

Paul is speaking to those who have fed on Christ by faith. These are Hebrew believers. Paul's argument here is that to feed upon Christ by faith is the highest of all privileges — more privileged than Old Testament priests who were forbidden to eat the sin offering. They have partaken of the benefits of Christ's death. But privilege brings a responsibility to side with the One Who has redeemed them. The exhortation to all who have tasted Christ and been forgiven their sins is, *Let us go forth... unto Him*. This is not an option that the individual Christian may choose to ignore if he pleases. It is the duty of all who belong to Christ to obey the word of God and separate to take a stand with the Saviour.

This is seen to be our duty when faced with the sufferings of Christ. Because Christ has suffered we are therefore to go to His side. To consider how great things He has done for us will mean that we will count all things but loss in order to gain the blessing of His company. Only as we really see the love of God to us in Christ will we love Him enough to leave everything for His sake. The motive of separation is PURE LOVE for Christ — love that is stirred up by a clear sight of His suffering in our place. Separation is never important to those who have a poor understanding of the sufferings of Christ that were necessary to purchase salvation for sinners.

To side with Christ is the instinctive reaction of every newborn believer. Usually this is when love for Christ is at its strongest. We read of Bartimaeus that Jesus said unto him, *Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way* (Mark 10:52). His way becomes the way of the cross for he joins



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Christ in the way that led the Saviour to Calvary and all its agonies. When first love cools and ardour declines then there is a tendency to stay in *the camp*. In Scripture the sin offering is associated with the believing sinner's first view of Christ. When the practical order of the sacrifices is discussed in the Pentateuch the sin offering is invariably first (e.g. Exodus 29:10-18). In the practical experience of the sinner at conversion Christ is first revealed to them by the Holy Spirit as the sinbearer. Later the believing sinner will learn of other aspects of Christ's death, for example, that it was a sweet savour to God as the burnt offering teaches, but FIRST he sees Christ as the One Who bore the guilt and penalty of his sin. We must get back to, and constantly maintain, that first love if we are to see the need for separation.

SCRIPTURAL SEPARATION WILL BRING REPROACH.

There is a burden to be carried by all those who will stand with Christ. It is a burden of reproach (v13). The word means "shame, blame, censure, disgrace". This is the price of siding with Christ. According to how we calculate, this will be too great a price or a price worth paying. If we love the praise of men more than the praise of God then *reproach* will be too heavy a price to pay. If, however, we love God and value His estimation of us this will be a small price to pay for His favour. *Let them curse, but bless thou* (Psalm 109:28) will be our attitude to those who scorn us. The delight of being where Christ is will make the abuse of those who despise the Saviour easy to bear.

Identity with Christ always brings the censure of the world. The unregenerate have no love for the Saviour and it follows that those who stand with Christ expose themselves to the same treatment the world gave Christ. The servant should expect no better than what the Master received. This is *His reproach* because it is for His sake; it is *His reproach* because He first suffered it; it is *His reproach* because when we are reproached for His sake He feels it. The fact that we will bear His reproach also tells us the nature of the shame we will have to bear. It will be like His. This is not something which we will naturally delight in. If we are to bear such reproach the work of the Spirit is vital — *we glory in tribulations... because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* (Romans 5:3-5). If we have a heart that recognizes how much the Lord loved us in order to save us from sin then separation to His cause will be no great hardship. To refuse to separate to Christ and stand outside the camp with Him is to demean the sacrifice of Christ, to count His love as insignificant, and to disobey the clear call of God to every believer.

The reproach that separation to Christ brings is nothing in comparison to the future glorious reward for faithfulness. Moses saw this great truth — *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God; than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward* (Hebrews 11 :24-16). On the same theme Paul wrote, *I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18) and also, *If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us* (II Timothy 2:12).



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Will you stand on the Lord's side no matter what the cost? The reward of doing so is infinite, the cost of not doing so is incalculable. God commands us all to take a separated stand with our Saviour .

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