

Introduction to Christian Ethics Part 2
Course Developed by Ron Habinski in 2002/2003
for

An Adult Bible Class, at Greenbelt Baptist Church, Ottawa

Unit #5 –Personal Separation

- This unit deals with the ethical issue of personal separation.
- There are people and things from which followers of Christ are required to keep themselves separate and apart.
- We will be examining what the Bible says about this sort of separation.
- It is important not to confuse Biblical separation with ***the idea of discriminating*** against other groups of people or ***segregating*** ourselves from groups of non-believers and living apart from them in christian communes or monasteries or as solitary hermits.
- Neither should Biblical separation be confused with ***legalism***.
- ***Legalism*** is preoccupied with creating detailed sets of rules to govern our every choice and action, and in this way marking ourselves off as different from others.
- ***It is also important to appreciate that Biblical separation is not fundamentally a negative idea, but rather a positive one.***

Q: What is the motive behind the idea of separation?

A: An answer is provided by 2 Cor 6:14-18 [READ].

- The underlying motive of separation is to draw closer to God and be true to Him
- To do this we have to distance ourselves from rival loves and commitments.
- Separation from some people and things is the natural consequence of being closer to other people and other things [**READ James 4:4; Rom 8:7-10**].
- Some loyalties are mutually exclusive, so that faithfulness to one loyalty may rule out another one.
- The Biblical ideal of separation is rooted in the holiness of God.
- The Hebrew root used in the Old Testament for the idea of holiness is ***qdsh***, while the Greek word used for it in the New Testament is ***hag***.
- A number of synonyms of the word, ***holy***, are used to translate these two roots into English in the Bible.
- These include the words ***sacred, saint, holy, make holy, sanctify*** and ***sanctified***.
- The fundamental idea of holiness is to ***beset apart*** or ***separate from what is common or ordinary***.
- As a consequence of this root idea the word ***holy*** means special or different.

Q: In what ways is our God special or different from all other gods?

A: [DISCUSS]

- God exists while other gods do not,
- He has no physical shape or form so all attempts to represent Him visibly are forbidden.
- He tolerates no worship of other gods by His worshippers (a jealous God)
- Other gods might be thought of as glad to have someone mention their names, but His

name is to be treated as holy, and so not used carelessly or lightly.

- He is the creator of all that lives or exists.
- He is a moral or ethically good being and requires all His children to be good
- He holds His children accountable for deviations from His revealed will.
- He is loving, just and gracious, and has provided, at His own expense, for the redemption of those who have acted wickedly.

- God insists that holiness be demonstrated in the lives and characters of His people

- **READ Lev 11:44f; Heb 12:10; 1 Pe 1:15f**].

- We have already noted that the root idea of holiness is *to be set apart and separate from the common or the ordinary*.

- Often, holiness is a matter of *special ownership status* and of *special quality or treatment*.

- *Very ordinary objects are* recognized as holy and **called holy when they become God's property by being given to him or dedicated to His service**.

- **Examples** of ordinary objects that were thought of as holy for this reason and are called holy in the Bible include a table or altar (Ex 29:37), a throne (Ps 47:8), pots and pans (2 Chron 5:15; Zech 14:21), oil (Ex 30:31), clothes (Ex 31:10), food items given to God (e.g. 1 Chron 23:13; Lev 22:12; 27:30) or things made special by God's action or choice, such as a day (Ex 20:8; Neh 8:9), a mountain (Ps 48:1), a people (Dt 7:6; 28:9), a city (Isa 48:2; Dan 9:4), priests (2 Chr 35:3) and a kiss (1 Cor 16:20) when it is exchanged between two people who belong to God.

- The word *holy* is also used to describe abstract things such as **faith** *when it is directed toward God* (Jude 20), **an agreement or covenant with God** (Dan 11:28), **writings that come from God** (Rom 1:2), **and God's name** (Ps 99:3).

- Under the law of Moses it was very important to distinguish between things that were holy and things that were not [**READ Lev 10:10**].

- Things that were holy also had to be special in quality and in the way they were treated.

- This was true, for example, of pots and pans that were given to God.

- When they were donated, the giver would ensure that they were special, - of high quality and in good condition.

- And after their dedication to God's use they would naturally be given special treatment: they would be kept clean, bright and safe.

- Similarly, God's holy name was to be regarded as special, like God Himself, and so it was to be treated as special too.

- It was not to be profaned by careless or disrespectful use (Lev 22:32; Ezk 20:39).

- The same was true of the Sabbath day, which was to be *remembered or regarded as special* and *treated as special*.

Q: In what sense was it to be special?

A: It was to be a day of rest (Ex 31:14).

- Individual persons become holy when God reconciles them to Himself through Jesus' substitutionary death. (**Col 1:22**).

- God sets such individuals apart from ordinary persons who are not redeemed.
 - The lives of the redeemed have a holy status, and they must be kept holy through the way they are treated or lived.
 - Personal holiness calls for a life that exhibits God's holiness.
 - Just as a holy pot had to be kept clean and polished, so a holy life has to be kept morally clean and pure, to reflect God's moral character.
 - The word *holy does not in and of it self mean pure or clean*, but *separate from the ordinary and the common*.
 - The idea of personal purity is a result or consequence of the root meaning of the word, *holy* which is *separate from the ordinary*.
 - In this world what is ordinary and the common tends to be sinful, so holiness, by way of contrast with the ordinary or common, comes to imply or require personal purity [**Titus 2:12-14**].
 - Often the flavour attached to the word, *holiness*, suggests personal purity, because holiness implies a special sort of life that is not sinful [**1Thes 3:13; 4:7; 2 Cor 7:1; Rev 22:11**]
 - In the Scriptures, Jesus (Lk 1:35; Acts 2:27), the prophets (Lk 1:70; Mk 6:20) and the apostles (Eph 3:5) are referred to as holy.
 - Probably this use of the word indicates both their *status* as God's personal representatives, *as well as* the fact that their lives were *characterized by purity*.
 - In His praying Jesus indicated that it was His purpose that all His followers be sanctified <made holy, separate, set apart> **Jn 17:17, 19**.
 - **Colossians 1:22f** *brings together the idea that our personal holiness has to do with God's action in giving us a special status as His, as well as with our actions in living in a way in keeping with that special status.*
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- Varying degrees of separation or intimacy are a normal feature of all human relationships.
 - Many people we do not know and may not care to know.
 - But each of us has various circles of acquaintances in our lives.
 - With each of our acquaintances we have a varying degree of co-operation, sharing and intimacy.
 - *How close we are to each individual of our acquaintance depends on how significant a part of life we share with them and how much light we have in common with them.*
 - With the *outer circle of our acquaintances* we share some sort of association.
 - This association may be based on shared interests, family ties, mutual acquaintances, shared work experiences or shared geographical location, nationality or language.
 - With such individuals we share physical life and have various superficial or external things in common, *but usually we do not share spiritual life with them*, and so our relationships do not go very deep.
 - Furthermore, *for Christians there is usually an underlying tension in such relationships*.

- As believers *we want to avoid exposure to influences that may be ethically and spiritually harmful, and people may be such influences in our lives* .
- But on the other hand, *we want to influence such individuals for good* by bringing them to know our Lord Jesus.
- We cannot do this without building bridges of friendship and personal involvement with them and loving them.
- In this area Jesus set an example for us by being a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34), so cutting ourselves off from people who do not know Him yet would be inconsistent with His example and the mission he has assigned to us.
- The *next circle of our acquaintances* can be referred to as people with whom we enjoy a measure of co-operation, based on a shared spiritual life.
- We may have differences of many sorts that keep us from becoming very close, but we recognize each other as spiritually alive in Christ, and we know that we have this very important treasure in common. [**READ Lk 9:49-50; Eph 4:3-6**]
- The *third and closest group of our acquaintances* includes those with whom we find ourselves able to develop truly close ties of fellowship and service, because we share both spiritual life and spiritual light.
- We share the same values and convictions on most important matters, and a mutual concern with obeying and serving Christ. [**READ Ps 119:63; Jn 17:18; 1 Cor 1:10; 1 Jn 1:3, 7**]
- These three circles of our acquaintances can change over time.
- Individual acquaintances may move from one group to another.

- Now that we have considered the three major types of acquaintances we have in this life, let's consider some of the specific types of separation that the Scriptures require us to maintain in our lives.
- I have been able to identify ten types, but perhaps you will be able to think of others.
- **We are to be separate:**
 1. **From evil** [**READ Romans 6:11-14; Eph 5:11; Jn 17: 15**]

 2. **Not from evil people** [**READ 1 Cor 5:9f; Mt 5:14-16**]
 - In **Hebrews 7:26** Jesus is described as “*set apart from sinners.*”
 - But the author is not referring to a separation which existed during the earthly life of Jesus.
 - He is referring to the fact that Jesus is now, “*Exalted above the heavens.*”

 3. **From people who influence us in an evil way**
 - [**READ Pv 22:24f; 1 Cor 15:33; James 4:4f**]
 - Jesus puts limits or boundaries around our friendships with others.
 - Some friends require us to go where they go and do what they do even when this means disobeying our Lord.
 - The value we place on such friends and friendships may lead us to

compromise with sin.

- There is a kind of friendship with unbelievers that is comfortable with wrong things that they may do or say and that goes along with or condones their actions to some extent and perhaps even joins in once in a while.
- To be involved in that sort of friendship with unbelievers involves letting them influence us for evil, and so it is spiritually and morally damaging.
- Individuals who are weak in their commitment to obey Jesus and inclined to go along with their friends are especially at risk in such relationships.
- Teens tend to be especially vulnerable in this area, because the approval of their peers is very important to them.

4. From evil thoughts and whatever brings them to mind [READ Phil 4:8; 2 Cor 10:5]

5. From evil impulses, urges or desires [READ 1 Pe 2:11]

- The challenge presented to us by this instruction is that desires do not come with convenient labels on them, marking them as sinful or innocent.
- And an ordinary human desire that in itself is neither evil nor good, may lead us to consider doing something that is not good in order to satisfy that desire.
- The only way we can obey this instruction is to continually monitor, evaluate and judge the actions that our desires lead us to consider.
- **READ Eph 4:22** -Desires that tempt us to do what is forbidden are deceitful because they assure us that giving in to them is worth it.

6. From worldliness [READ 1 Jn 2:15-17; Jas 4:4f; Rom 12:2; (Tit 2:12)]

- Worldliness is an attitude of heart and mind that adopts the world's values and attitudes toward life.
- In order to obey this instruction we must continually compare the attitudes and desires that our friends and culture encourage in us with the teachings of Jesus.
- This involves having an active conscience that is taught in the word and sensitive to gentle invitations to go a slightly different way.

7. From false teachings and those who teach them [Mt 7:15-23; 1 Tim 4:1-5; 2 Tim 4:3-5a; 2 Pe 2:1-3; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 2 Jn 7-11; Rev 2:14-16; Mt 24:5, 11f, 24f; 2 Cor 6:14f; Gal 1:8; 2 Thes 2:4]

- These passages seem to require the unmasking of false prophets who are discredited by their teachings or their lives.
- Also ruled out is inviting teachers of false doctrine and members of false cults into our homes and giving them an opportunity to teach us their views.

8. From entering into close partnerships with non believers [READ 2 Cor 6:14-18 Cf. the Old Testament passage Paul is referring to: Dt 22:10 (ox (clean) and ass (unclean))]

- Paul does not specifically spell out all the types of partnerships with non-believers that we are to avoid, but he evidently has in mind relationships in which two people work together in a shared purpose, and in which conflicting allegiances can cause problems.
- It is reasonable to think that the principle Paul is teaching includes the sorts of partnerships that bring us into a close and ongoing partnership in business or in marriage.
- This passage shows that there are limits to how close a Christian can be to a non-believer; beyond a certain point we cannot go while being loyal to Jesus.
- Unfortunately, some seem to have understood this principle as implying guilt by association.
- They have attributed guilt by association to Billy Graham, because he allowed religious groups and leaders of any stripe to join in sponsoring his evangelistic crusades.
- His critics have generally recognized that he was committed to keeping his preaching true to the Scriptures.
- But they have condemned and blamed him for permitting church leaders who were not true to historic Christianity to sit behind him on the platform and be recognized as supporters of his work.

Q: Are you comfortable with this critical approach to his work?

A: [DISCUSS]

- It can be argued that Billy Graham was not truly in partnership with them, because he did not allow them to influence or control what he preached.

9. From divisive disciples [READ Rom 16:17f; Tit 3:10f; 1 Cor 1:10ff; Jude 4, 11-13, 18f]

10. From fellowship with professing disciples who are carnal, worldly or in rebellion against God. [READ 1 Cor 5:9-13; 2 Thes 3:6-15 (Read this passage in NASB for a literal rendering of verse 6 <leads an unruly life> instead of the paraphrase: “who is idle” used in the NIV. The original speaks of a general principle and then applies it in the case of a particular sin; the NIV loses the general principle by its paraphrasing); 2 Tim 3:1-9 ; Mt 18:15-17]

- This group includes individuals who are openly and blatantly involved in wicked behaviour and are unrepentant.
- We have examined passages that require us to practice personal separation

- ❖ from evil, though not from evil people;
- ❖ from evil thoughts and whatever brings them to mind;
- ❖ from impulses that lead us to consider sinful actions;
- ❖ from worldliness which involves having the same goals and perspectives on life as the world around us;
- ❖ from false teachings and those who teach them;
- ❖ from close partnerships of any sort with non believers;
- ❖ from divisive disciples; and
- ❖ from fellowship with professing disciples who are carnal, worldly or in rebellion against God

- These are the main principles I have found taught in the Scriptures concerning personal separation.

Q: Can you think of any other types of personal separation that are required by the Scriptures?

A: [DISCUSS]