

SEPARATION

Background

The thread of redemption throughout the Bible demonstrates God's will to be that man should be able to have a relationship of love and trust towards him, expressed in obedience. Since the time when Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden for disobedience, God has patiently sought to restore their (our) lost relationship through the witness of people of faith. Faithful obedience was demonstrated by Noah, and God gave a great covenant promise when he saved him from a wicked generation. Abraham was a great man of faith, obedient to God, and God gave the great 'Abrahamic' covenant through him. God gave a covenant to the Hebrew people through Moses, to whom he gave the law (*Torah*) at Mount Sinai. (See Exodus **25:8**; **29:45–46**; Psalm **107**.) Finally, the great messianic covenant was sealed by the blood of Jesus, who spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper of the new covenant. (See Note 1.) God had repeatedly rescued his people when they cried out to him. Finally, as recorded in the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, true God and true man, came to earth as the Messiah. He came to save people from their sin, and to provide the means to fulfil the divine plan of redemption.

God is perfectly good, holy, righteous and just, and our sin causes a barrier, separating us from him. Our transgressions (whether stemming from ignorance or from deliberately wilful disobedience to his perfect law), our selfishness, our rebellion and the replacement of him at the centre of our lives by other things, all these separate us from him, and must ultimately be punished, for a holy God cannot dwell with sin. (See Isaiah **59:2**; Ezekiel **14:7**; Hosea **9:10**.) It is only by his grace, through faith in the finished saving work of Jesus, who took the full punishment for our sins on the cross, that we can approach him, and make a sanctuary where he may dwell.

Types of separation in Scripture

- separation of physical things (Genesis **1:4** – light from darkness)
- separation from God because of sin (Isaiah **59:2**)
- separation of individuals to God for ministry (Aaron – 1 Chronicles **23:13**)
- separation of chosen groups for ministry (Levites – Deuteronomy **10:8**)
- separation of the Hebrew nation for witness (Israel – Exodus **33:16**; Leviticus **20:24**; 1 Kings **8:53**)
- separation of nations (ethnic groups) for judgment (Matthew **25:32**)
- separation of people for the work of the gospel (Paul – Romans **1:1**)
- separation of the righteous from rebellious people (Numbers **16:21**; Ezra **6:21**; Luke **6:22**)
- separation of righteous from the wicked (ultimate – Matthew **13:49**)
- separation from impurity and uncleanness (2 Corinthians **6:17**)
- separation from the world (sanctification of believers by the word of truth – John **17:14–16**; renewing of the mind – Romans **12:2**)

As Jesus prayed to the Father, he declared of believers that, "*They are not of the world...*"

The desire for worldly pleasures as ends in themselves is sinful. [This is not about the proper appreciation of God's good gifts in creation; we give thanks to him for those gifts. He gives them for proper use in accordance with his purposes and law. What is forbidden is greed, envy, covetousness, improper usages forbidden in God's law, and placing created things above the Creator (a form of idolatry).] For mankind, therefore, separation is thus usually *from* evil people, sinful actions and attitudes, though we are still 'in the world' and are to witness in the midst of human life, and there may be separation *for* God for a holy work. We are to be consecrated in a process of sanctification, believers trusting in him and obeying him, living in faith (which includes faithfulness.) (See Exodus **33:16**; Leviticus **15:31**; 1 Chronicles **23:13**; John **17:14–16**.) To be an effective and true disciple of Jesus inevitably must involve a measure of separation from worldly things.

Compromise

To attack the purpose and value of separation from evil or separation to the Lord, Satan offers compromise, usually in a subtle and disguised form. Consider Pharaoh's offers (in a sequence of deception) to Moses, who sought to obey God's command to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt to worship God. Pharaoh says to Moses, and by implication to us:

Exodus **8:25**. Do your religious practices where you are (in Egypt – in sin). The suggestion is: it is fine here – don't stand out, stay in prison under our yoke, you don't need to leave.

Exodus **8:28**. Go a little way, but not too far. The enemy's suggestion, and the temptation for us, would be: do

not be disciplined for the Lord, don't be zealous, then it won't cost you so much. (But see Luke **14:26–27**.)

Exodus **10:11**. The wrong suggestion here is: go with only some of your people; don't care for your family, or your other responsibilities.

Exodus **10:24**. The temptation is to leave parts of life (including means of livelihood) out of the matter. But God wants the whole of us, not just part!

Satan's offer of compromise can be like this: 'Don't overdo it! Partial obedience is OK, little white lies don't count, keep the best for yourself.' But Moses was strong – 'No hoof shall be left behind'. There can be no compromise with sin if we want to know God's presence. Separation from the world requires clean, deliberate godly choices to be made. Lot's wife looked back at Sodom (Genesis **19:26**) and died as a result. Compromise always involves mixed lifestyles, and that can set a person on the broad way which leads to ruin.

Moses chose to suffer affliction rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. (See Exodus **10:26**.)

Jesus was always faithful and obedient to the Father. His example encourages us to make a good choice into a habit, and a good habit into a permanent feature of our character.

1 Corinthians **10:20**; Hebrews **5:8** and **11:25**; Revelation **22:11**.

Choices

Jesus chooses his disciples out of the world, and Paul instructs them to purge out the sin-life, even if it means separation from worldly or disorderly 'friends', and from uncleanness and youthful lusts.

God invites us to draw near to him. He provides the only way, the new and living way – for which the believer has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Make a choice today to separate yourself from the world's attractions and temptations, and separate yourself from them for the living God. Draw near to him. If we seek him, and search for him with all our heart, his promise is that he will be found by us.

Psalm **65:4**; Psalm **73:28a**; Jeremiah **29:13–14**; John **15:18–19** and **17:6, 14–17**; 1 Corinthians **5:7**; 1 Thessalonians **4:7**; 1 Timothy **3:14–15**; 2 Timothy **2:22**; Hebrews **10:19–22**.

Note

Two useful books available from Glory to Glory Publications look at the subject of the covenants: *Defending Christian Zionism*, David Pawson; *The Case for Enlargement Theology*, Alex Jacob.