

THE MINISTRY: ITS CALL TO SEPARATION AND CONSECRATION

2 CORINTHIANS 06:11–07:01

Introduction

When the subject of separation is approached, it is often dreaded. People just misunderstand what separation really means. To most people, spiritual separation means that they have to give up this, quit going there and stop doing that. They feel it means never again having fun and enjoying the pleasures of this world. This is all most people see and think when they hear of spiritual separation. However, the greatest call in all the world is the call to separation and consecration. A person can be saved from this world and given absolute assurance of living forever as a son or daughter of God. Just imagine the glory of being truly adopted as a son or daughter of God! This is the truth of separation and consecration.

- I. Call 1: open your heart (vv. 11-13).
- II. Call 2: do not be yoked together with unbelievers — you are different (vv. 14-16).
- III. Call 3: come out from among unbelievers and be separate (vv. 17-18).
- IV. Call 4: cleanse yourselves and perfect holiness (Ch. 7:1).

I. 2 Corinthians 06:11–13 An Open Heart

The first call is for an open heart. An open heart is an absolute essential for separation and consecration. No person is going to separate himself from the world and consecrate his life to God unless he has an open heart and mind.

1. Note how Paul's heart is open and full of affection for the Corinthian church.
 - a. "You Corinthians": he speaks directly to the church as though face to face, which always shows strong feelings.
 - b. "We have spoken freely": he has spoken openly and honestly, without hesitation or equivocation.
 - c. "We have opened wide our hearts": his heart is open to them, and his affection has grown as he has been sharing the truth with them.
 - d. "We are not withholding our affection from you": the word *withholding* (stenochoeisthe) means to be restricted, to lack room, to be pressed or distressed, to be in anguish or straits. Paul says there was no lack of room in his heart for the church; no restriction against them. He held nothing against them. His heart was wide open to receive them.
2. Note how narrow and closed the church was to Paul. Their hearts were *withholding* (stenochoeisthe), restricted, closed, had little if any room for Paul.

Paul appeals to them: "as a fair exchange," that is, return to him the same enlarged and open heart that he has shown them. Note that Paul calls them his children; therefore,

just as children open their hearts and receive their parents with affection, he begs them to receive him and his instructions with affection.

Thought 1. Two things are absolutely essential if the church is going to ever hear the call of God and His ministry.

(1) A minister with an open, honest and loving heart toward God and His people.

(2) A church with an open, honest and loving heart toward God and His chosen minister.

John 15:12 “My command is this: ‘Love each other as I have loved you.’”

John 13:35 “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Rom 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

2 Cor 9:10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Eph 4:14-15 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

1 Th 3:12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

1 Pet 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

II. 2 Corinthians 06: 14–16 *Believers are Radically Different*

The second call is for believers not to be yoked together with unbelievers. The reasons are clearly stated: believers are *different from unbelievers, ever so different*. Just how different is seen in the words *yoked together* (heterozugountes). It refers back to the Old Testament where God forbade the ploughing of an ox with an ass (Deu. 22:10), or the union of different kinds of animals (Lev. 19:19). The point is...

- that the union of a genuine believer with an unbeliever would be as different as the union between two kinds of animals.
- that the ploughing through life of a believer with an unbeliever would be as difficult as the ploughing of a field with an ox and an ass yoked together.

Genuine believers are radically different from unbelievers. Five areas clearly reveal the fact. Note that each area is introduced with a question.

1. Believers differ from unbelievers in fellowship. “What do righteousness and wickedness have in common?” The word “wickedness” (anomia) means lawlessness. Unbelievers have not and do not obey God. They live and do as they wish, not as God

says. They reject God and what God says and go about doing their own thing. They rebel against God and His commandments, living lawless and unrighteous lives.

- a. They have not believed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to save them.

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- b. They do not seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Mat 6:33 *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

- c. They do not hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Mat 5:6 *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*

Note the word *common* (metoche) means sharing and participation. How can a believer who focuses his life upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ share and participate with unbelievers who care little if anything about Jesus Christ and His call to righteousness?

2. Believers differ from unbelievers in communion. “What fellowship does light have with darkness?” The word *fellowship* (koinonia) means to be in union, in partnership, in a bound fellowship, to be closely bound together. It means to be so closely bound together that there is open and mutual sharing: what one has belongs to the other. The point is clear: there is no such communion or union between light and darkness. On the contrary, light and darkness are mutually exclusive, of different natures entirely. They cannot co-exist.

- a. Light is the symbol or picture of believers.

=> Believers are said to become “sons of light” through belief in the Light, Jesus Christ Himself (Jn. 12:36).

=> Believers have been transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of Christ, the inheritance of light (Col. 1:13).

=> Before they come to Christ, believers are not only in darkness but are an embodiment of darkness. But when they come to Christ, believers are placed in the Light and become an embodiment of the Light itself (Eph. 5:8).

=> Believers are the light of the world (Mt. 5:14-16).

=> Believers are to set their light on a lamp stand — to make their light conspicuous (Mt. 5:15).

=> Evil-doers shun the light (Jn. 3:20f).

=> The creation of light is a picture of the expulsion of spiritual darkness (Gen. 1:2f).

b. Darkness is the symbol or picture of unbelievers. (See *Darkness*, 2 Cor. 6:14.)

The point is striking: the nature of believers and unbelievers differs as radically as light differs from darkness.

=> As sons of light, believers know the light of God, *live* by the light of God, and are *blessed* by the light of God.

=> As sons of darkness, unbelievers know the darkness of this world, live by the darkness of the world, and receive only the blessings of the world's darkness (temporary pleasure and possessions, and the hopelessness of death and judgment).

3. Believers differ in attachment and covenant. "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?" Belial refers to Satan. The name "Belial" refers in particular to the worthlessness, wickedness and impurity of Satan's character. He is pictured as the head or leader of unbelievers; whereas Christ is pictured as the Head or Leader of believers. The picture is striking:

=> the forces of good and evil stand opposed to each other.

=> Christ stands opposed to Belial.

=> the Righteous One stands opposed to the wicked one.

=> the Worthy One stands opposed to the worthless one.

=> the righteousness and purity of Christ stand opposed to the wickedness and impurity of Belial.

If a person does not follow Christ, then Scripture says he is following Belial or Satan. Therefore, it is impossible for a genuine believer to live in harmony with those who follow the lead of Belial instead of Christ. Believers cannot be attached to those who live wicked and impure lives — persons who follow the leader of all unworthiness, that is, the devil.

1 Cor 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

4. Believers differ in faith or belief. "What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" The word "unbeliever" (apistou) means a person who has chosen to disbelieve in Christ and has deliberately rejected Him. The word "common" (meris) means a person's portion, lot, sphere, realm or participation in life.

The believer's faith is pictured as changing his whole life: his belief causes him to move in a whole new sphere or realm of life. He may live among unbelievers, living and working next to them, but he moves in a different realm. His purpose and behaviour upon earth is different:

=> The believer believes that Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world; the unbeliever does not.

=> The believer lives as Christ dictates; the unbeliever lives as he wishes.

=> The believer seeks to honour Christ by putting Christ first and serving Him; the unbeliever lives for self and the world and its possessions.

The very meaning, purpose and significance of life differ radically between the believer and unbeliever. The believer seeks Christ and the things of Christ, whereas the unbeliever focuses his life primarily upon this world and self.

5. Believers differ in worship. “What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?” The word “agreement” (sunkatathesis) means close agreement, a close union and bond of mind and spirit. There can be no agreement, no union and no bond whatsoever between the temple of God and idols. Idolatry, above all else, is despised by God, for an idol is the substitute god of a man. An idol replaces God in a man’s life. A man’s worship or idol may be ranging from self or personal ideas over to graven images or possessions. A man may worship and make an idol out of anything, such as...

- money
- houses
- land
- vehicles
- position
- recreation
- power
- family
- fame
- religion
- recognition
- profession

An idol can be anything to which a man gives his primary allegiance — his time, energy, money. Wherever a man puts his primary time, energy and money and allegiance is where his heart and worship are.

This is one of the most significant differences between the believer and the unbeliever: the believer is not an idolater. In fact, he himself is the very temple of God. His very body is said to be one of the special places where God’s presence dwells. The believer is able to know, sense and feel God’s presence and power within him. Note that Paul quotes from the Old Testament to illustrate his point:

2 Cor 6:16 *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”* (cp. Lev. 26:11-12; Ezk. 37:27)

The point is clear: the believer worships the living and true God, not idols. He cannot agree with the worship of unbelievers; he cannot live and walk with unbelievers in worship, for his worship differs radically from the worship of unbelievers.

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

John 14:20 “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”

1 Cor 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

1 Cor 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.

2 Cor 6:16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Eph 2:22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

1 Pet 2:5 You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him.

2 CORINTHIANS 06:14 DARKNESS (SKOTOS, SKOTIA)

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Cor 06:14

The word is used in Scripture to describe both the state and the works of man. Darkness is very real in Scripture.

1. The darkness refers to the world of the natural man who does not know Jesus Christ (Jn. 8:12). The natural man walks in ignorance...
 - of Jesus Christ.
 - of God as revealed by Jesus Christ.
 - of the real purpose and destiny of life as shown by Jesus Christ.

The natural man stumbles and gropes about in this world. He knows nothing other than the things of this world as he sees them. His only hope is the hope of living a long life before death overtakes him. He walks in darkness, ignorant of real life now and hereafter (cp. Jn. 12:35, 46).

2. The darkness symbolizes unpreparedness and unwatchfulness. It symbolizes the time when evil occurs (1 Th. 5:4-8).

3. The darkness is loved by men. Sinful men do their evil deeds under the cover of darkness. Men therefore hate the light because the light uncovers their evil behaviour (Jn. 3:19-20).
4. The darkness is hostile to light (Jn. 1:5). Darkness does not understand the light, does not overcome the light, does not extinguish the light (Jn. 8:12). □

III. *2 Corinthians 06:17–18 Separation – Adoption*

The third call is for believers to come out from unbelievers and be separate. These two verses are a quote from the Old Testament (Isa. 52:11-12). When God led Israel out of the Babylonian captivity, He told them to leave everything behind. They were to take nothing out of the defiled land, for they were to begin a totally new life under His leadership. Note three significant points.

1. First, believers are to come out from among unbelievers and be separate. What does this mean? Of course, it does *not* mean that believers are to leave the cities, communities and work places of the world. Believers are not to isolate themselves from unbelievers. It does not mean that believers have nothing to do with unbelievers – never talking, sharing or associating with them. Both believers and unbelievers are in the world, and they have to share the world together.

What God means is at least two things.

- a. God means what has just been discussed (v. 14-16). Believers differ from unbelievers; they differ radically. Therefore...
 - believers are not to be “yoked together” with unbelievers. They are not to be *yoked*, be intimately involved in a relationship with unbelievers.
 - believers are not to be in “communion” with unbelievers. They are not to share and participate in the worldly life and functions and events of unbelievers.
 - believers are not to be in “fellowship” with unbelievers. They are not to be closely bound in partnership with unbelievers. They are not to be so united with unbelievers that there has to be open and mutual sharing of person and possessions.
 - believers are not to be attached nor in covenant with unbelievers. Believers must not follow the worthless leader, Belial (Satan), of the unbelievers.
 - believers are not to move about in the sphere, the realm, the life and position of the unbeliever, the person who has rejected Jesus Christ.
 - believers are not to worship with unbelievers.
- b. God means what He says in this verse: believers are not to touch the unclean thing. Believers are no longer to live as the sinners of the world. They are not to participate in the sins of unbelievers.

Rom 1:29-32 *They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

1 Cor 6:9-10 *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

Gal 5:19-21 *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Thought 1. Very simply stated, believers are *in* the world, but they are not to be *of* the world. They live *in* the world, but they are not to take part in the sins of the world.

2. Second, note that separation is a command of God Himself. "Be separate, says the Lord." There is to be no questioning, rationalizing, twisting or ignoring of the command. God demands separation. In fact, separation is so important to God, it is one of the essentials to be *received by God* (see next point, point 3).
3. Third, the results of separation are phenomenal.
 - a. If we separate ourselves and consecrate our lives to God, He *receives* us. The word means to accept, approve, welcome. Imagine being accepted and approved by God Himself! God cannot receive a person who lives in sin and shame, in worldliness and immorality, in covetousness and idolatry. But if a person comes out from the world and separates himself, God receives that person.

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.*

- b. If we separate ourselves and consecrate our lives to God, God will become our Father and adopt us as sons and daughters of His. Note that it is the "Lord Almighty" who adopts us, the only Person who has the *might and power* to do such a glorious thing. God's relationship to us is that of a father to his sons and daughters! God *favours and nurtures us* with...

- love
- care
- provision
- protection
- deliverance
- direction
- growth
- discipline
- affection
- instruction
- glory
- reward
- guidance
- life
- reproof
- chastisement

John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

Rom 8:15-17 *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”*

Gal 4:5-6 *To redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”*

IV. 2 Corinthians 07:01 Cleansing and Holiness

The fourth call is for believers to cleanse themselves and to perfect holiness. God gives two of the most wonderful promises imaginable: to receive us and to adopt us as His sons and daughters. Therefore, God expects two things from us.

1. God expects us to cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit. All sin makes man dirty, but there are certain sins that especially pollute his body and other sins that especially pollute his spirit. A glance at the list of sins in the verses of the former note will clearly show this (Rom. 1:29-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:3-7). Sins of the body would be such sins as immorality and drunkenness, and sins of the spirit would be such sins as hatred and jealousy.

Acts 22:16 *‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’*

2 Cor 7:1 *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

2 Tim 2:21 *If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

James 4:8 *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Isa 1:16 *Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong.*

Jer 4:14 *O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbour wicked thoughts?*

2. God expects us to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Note that this is continuous action. The word “perfecting” (*epitelountes*) is an aggressive word demanding aggressive action. It means not only to practice but to finish and complete. The believer is, of course, to *practice holiness*. That is, he is to practice doing the things that will make him holy. But he is to do *much more*: he is to pursue holiness aggressively, seeking to perfect and complete holiness in his life. Of course, the believer can never become perfectly holy: he cannot become God. But he is to set his mind and heart upon becoming holy.

Note the motive for holiness: the fear of God. The word fear means not only fear, but also awe and reverence. When a man really sees and understands God and what God has done for him he ceases to fear men. Instead he fears God and stands in awe of God, seeking to please God by living a holy and pure life.

Luke 1:50 *His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.*

Acts 10:35 *But accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.*

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Heb 12:14 *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

1 Pet 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

2 Pet 3:11 *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. ■*