

GALATIANS

Lesson 23

Separation Galatians 6:11-18

INTRODUCTION

This is the twenty-third and final lesson on the Book of Galatians. I trust that through this study you have drawn closer to Jesus Christ and have become wiser in the doctrine of grace. You should now more clearly realize that salvation and sanctification are only obtained by grace through faith in Christ, and that every Christian has been delivered from the bondage of the Mosaic Law and set free in Christ. God's grace has given the Christian real liberty. However, this new Christian liberty is not a license to sin, but a mandate to live a godly life and to serve Jesus Christ daily.

Those who understand what it means to be touched by the grace of God in salvation are going to live lives of separation. The word "separation" is an emotional word among some Christians and different groups look at separation in different ways. When one group thinks of separation they immediately associate it with separation from evil things and surely the Bible teaches this concept (2 Cor. 6:14-18 **"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 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.' '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.'")**).

Christians are to be separated and have a different kind of life than the non-Christian. However, separation from evil things often becomes perverted by men who want to place the emphasis upon externals rather than internals. This leads people to give their own man-made definition of worldliness and separation. Personal bias is given precedence over the Word as to one's authority on the subject of separation. Separation in their mind degenerates to a crisis of issues like whether women should wear makeup or a certain dress code or the rights and wrongs of certain amusements. They get hung up on the externals and they forget the internals. The result of this is that they become legalistic in Christian living.

However, there is another group at the other extreme who thinks of separation as something only internal and personal. Therefore, these people feel free to do whatever they want and have no desire to have their external life conform to Christ. These folks become libertines in Christian living. There is a balance in Christian separation and we must be diligent to seek that balance. Separation is first internal and unto God and this relationship will affect our external appearance and actions (1 Thess. 1:9 **"They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."**).

We first turn **to** God and then we turn **from** idols, for separation springs from internalized convictions. Separation is basically a mental attitude that wants to please Christ in everything. This mental attitude will submit to any teaching on separation in the bible, and anything that is not mentioned in the scriptures will be considered in light of one's personal relationship with Christ. Separation is an attitude which considers Christ first in everything that one says and does. Worldliness is any mental attitude that excludes Jesus Christ from one's thinking.

A person could be at a wild party and be separated unto Christ. If the Christian was there witnessing to someone or helping a non-Christian in some way, his mind would be occupied with Christ. However, another person could be sitting in the middle of a pitch-black room, or in church, and be worldly, because his mind was thinking worldly thoughts and not occupied with Christ.

In Galatians 6:11-18, we have a statement of practical, down-to-earth separation. The thrust is not upon “do’s and don’ts” but upon a life of separation to the person of Jesus Christ because of His infinite grace in saving the Christian.

THE ESSENCE OF SEPARATION 6:11-14

“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”

It was the habit of the Apostle Paul to dictate his letters to an *amanuensis* (a secretary or scribe). He often would pick up a pen and give the concluding remarks, making the letter more personal and also stamping it with apostolic authority.

We do not know exactly why he wrote this last section in large handwriting. Some think it was to impress upon his readers the importance of the subject matter. It seems that a better explanation is that Paul was suffering from *ophthalmis*, a serious eye disease that affected his eyesight. He wrote large letters so he could see what he was writing.

“Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised.”

The Judaizers with their false teaching were telling the Galatian Christians that they could not be saved unless they kept the Mosaic Law and were circumcised. These Judaizers concentrated on the outward act of circumcision, rather than the inward attitude of the heart. God intended circumcision to be a sign of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament, and it was simply an external ritual designed to speak of the internal reality of faith in God. Circumcision had nothing to do with the heart, nor was salvation in any way connected with circumcision, for men of all ages have been saved by grace through faith.

Furthermore, circumcision is no longer valid as a sign of the covenant in the new age of the church. The sign today is water baptism. Yet, these Judaizers were trying to force circumcision upon these Galatians to make a good showing in the flesh.

Because water baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant in the New Testament there are today in Christendom many who stress water baptism as necessary for salvation. They, like the Judaizers, have placed their emphasis upon an outward symbol rather than an inward change of heart.

Some Christians who would not believe that water baptism saves will state one cannot be a member of their church unless that person has been baptized by their particular mode, either immersion, pouring or sprinkling. These folks also have more emphasis upon the symbol than upon the heart relationship of a person toward Jesus Christ. Externalism feeds the flesh and breeds super-pious people.

“The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.”

The Judaizers wanted what they thought was the best of two worlds. They liked the idea that Christ was the Messiah, but they felt that a person had to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. They honestly thought their scheme of theology would please both Christians and Jews alike. Yet, by preaching the Law for salvation, the Judaizers were actually preaching salvation by works. They were preaching a gospel men liked and it brought no persecution.

All men by nature want to work for their salvation, but Christianity is the one religion that teaches salvation cannot be attained by works or merit. It must be a gift from God and appropriated by faith. Salvation by works feeds man’s ego and tells him he is basically a good person. Salvation by grace through faith, however, tells man he is a sinner and in need of Christ to save him. It crushes man’s ego.

The cross of Christ is offensive because men must see themselves as guilty sinners and under the wrath of God before they turn to Jesus Christ in self-denunciation and receive Him as personal Lord and Savior.

Real Christian separation means we go all out for Jesus Christ. We cannot have one foot in the world and one foot in Christianity. We, who are Christians, have trusted Christ alone to save us, and we are committed to follow Him, even to the point of suffering for the true meaning of the Cross.

“Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised.”

The Apostle Paul points out that not even the Judaizers kept the Mosaic Law perfectly. They may have kept the external, ceremonial aspects of the Law, but they broke the internal, moral aspects of the Law consistently. This only proved that they were sinners and in need of an inward change of heart through Jesus Christ. Yet, the irony of the whole thing is that they would have the Galatians keep the Law when they themselves could not keep it.

“That they may boast about your flesh.”

These Judaizers boasted to their Jewish friends about the numbers of Gentile-Christians who were circumcised because of their teaching. They gloried in these external acts of circumcision which had no real inward reality. Perhaps these external things were a psychological cover-up for the real guilt they felt for their failure to keep the Law.

There are many in the modern church who are just like the Judaizers of old. Preachers today boast of great numbers of people baptized when many of these folks have never had an internal change for Christ. Or they boast about thousands of decisions being made for Christ and yet many never go on with Christ, and hosts of people abandon Christ. Externalism breeds a bragging and proud spirit. Yet, it is absurd to stress the externals if a man's heart is not changed.

There is an obsession today with numbers, externals, bigness and success in Christian circles. Religious formalism and running the church like a business sounds the death-knell for true Christianity. So much of modern-day Christianity is dull, dismal and dead and is largely an external show. Formalism is a substitute religion for its demands are only external and ceremonial, and yet true Christianity is a commitment of the heart to Christ.

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If Paul was going to glory, he was not going to glory in the bigness of his churches, or the number of his churches, or how many people were making decisions for Christ. He was going to glory in the death of Christ for his sins.

Paul did not dodge the cross. He faced it squarely and yielded to the demands of Christ on his life. Those who have trusted in Christ have already humbled themselves as hell-deserving sinners and have given up any hope of saving themselves by works and have abandoned all self-effort. They have fled only to Christ for salvation and glory only in the Cross.

“Through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

The “world” in this context seems to be the world system headed up by Satan which is totally non-Christian and alienated from God. The world system is the mass of unsaved humanity who have a total secular philosophy and are controlled by Satan himself. The world is the system Satan uses as a means to accomplish his purposes against God, God's program and God's people. Because of the new birth, which comes from God, the world and the Christian have parted company. Each has been crucified to the other. This, of course, is speaking about a positional crucifixion because the world still has a strong pull on the Christian after conversion to Christ.

Christians are co-crucified with Christ because of spiritual union with Christ. The world died to the Christian in that it no longer has the mastery over the Christian, and its hold and authority over the Christian has been broken. The Christian died to the world also, which means that in his experience he has no right to adopt the world's philosophy, standards of patterns.

The person who has genuinely trusted Christ from the heart now has an internal conviction that he belongs to Christ and separates himself from the world. When a person is truly changed inwardly through the new birth, he does not care what the world things or does, but he only cares that he pleases Christ in all his thoughts and actions.

A true Christian may go back and flirt with the world, but he will be very miserable in his experience. The Holy Spirit is always in the Christian to bring conviction when he is flirting with the world.

THE EXERCISE OF SEPARATION 6:15-16

“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, what counts is a new creation.”

What really matters is not that a man has been circumcised or baptized, but whether he has been born again and a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17 **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”** Eph. 2:10 **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do god works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**).

Real separation of the heart begins with the new birth from God when a person is made a new creation in Christ. Separation cannot be caused by putting legalistic laws over people’s heads, but by the new birth, which brings an inward change to a person’s sin nature.

“Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule.”

What rule is it that if kept can bring God’s peace and mercy on the Christian in his experience? This is the rule of the spiritual new creation of a man by God, which comes about by grace through faith in Christ. This involves the whole concept of grace in salvation, for only those who are touched by the grace of God are inwardly born of the Spirit and genuinely trust Christ from the heart.

“Even to the Israel of God.”

Who are the Israel of God? Many believe they are physical Jews who have trusted Jesus Christ. They are converted Jews in the church. They translate the word “even” (*kai*) as “and.” However, I personally believe the translators of the NIV have the correct interpretation, referring it to all Jews and Gentiles who have trusted in Christ, making up the true Israel of God. All Christians are spiritual Jews because they have the inward reality of the new birth. This does not say the Gentiles become physical Jews, but Gentiles who trust in Christ become spiritual Jews and have a continuity with God’s people in the Old Testament.

Those who trust Christ are true Jews (Rom. 2:28-29 **“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.”**).

They are spiritual seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29 **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**).

They are spiritually circumcised (Phil. 3:3 **“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.”**).

The Jew in the Old Testament was to be separated from the world, so the Christian in the New Testament is a spiritual Jew and is to be separated from the world. Separation is basically internal and springs from the heart.

THE EVIDENCE OF SEPARATION 6:17-18

“Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.”

Paul had proof positive of his separation unto Christ. The marks in his body were the wounds which he received while being persecuted for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor. 11:23-25 “. . . **I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked . . .**”). Paul had permanent scars to prove that he was separated unto the gospel and preaching it in such a way that unbelievers at times became so disturbed they tried to kill him.

The word “marks” is the Greek word stigma, and was used in the secular Greek world for the branding of a slave. Paul was a slave of Jesus Christ. He received his branding in his persecutions. Do you have any scars to prove your separation to Christ? In the USA we are not physically persecuted for our Christian beliefs, but do we have any spiritual scars? Do we bear spiritual wounds because we are a faithful witness for Jesus Christ? Christians are to be separated unto Christ and stand for the gospel. This, of course, will bring persecution from the world, but it will also bring much more blessing from God.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.”

Paul began this epistle with the concept of grace (Gal. 1:3 **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**). He admonished them about moving away from the truth of grace (Gal. 1:6 **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.”**). His last thought in this letter is about grace. The whole epistle is about grace.

God’s grace convicts the sinner and draws him to Christ. God’s grace saved the sinner apart from any human merit through the finished work of Christ for sin. It is God’s grace that sanctifies and leads the Christian in his daily walk with the Lord. All of Christianity is grace from start to finish. No one has really understood the gospel who has not grasped that Christianity is first a divine work of grace and is secondly inward and spiritual from the heart.

CONCLUSION

There are some within the sound of my voice who have not yet been touched by the grace of God. When you trust in Christ, then you will come to understand that even your faith was by God’s grace. You must have a spiritual birth in your heart by the internal working of God’s Spirit if you are going to be saved. Law, works, good deeds, externalism, ritualism, traditionalism, formalism or church membership cannot save you from your sins. Only God’s grace through Christ can save you and give you eternal life. Your responsibility is to believe in Christ and you will be saved. Grace must bring you to Christ, but grace cannot believe for you. You will not be saved until you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-9 **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”**).