

Be worthy of your calling

An introduction to the theme of separation

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IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE we deal with the practical and spiritual principles of separation and the basis of our separation in the sight of God. We have taken themes from Ephesians for most of the main articles, as well as looking at many practical issues that these themes on separation raise in everyday life. There are questions for readers to consider, and these may also be of use in a Bible Class or other group discussion. This introductory article briefly outlines the dangers we face as individuals and as a community today, and the very privileged and blessed position we hold, as those "now in Christ Jesus".

THE CHALLENGE facing us today is to retain the distinctiveness of our faith, in both individual and ecclesial life. Why is it that we appear to be losing our edge, our sharpness, our vitality, at a time when the world is full of signs of the nearness of our Master's return? There is an air of respectability about us and what we do. We neither excite nor offend nor upset people; there is a blandness about us, we merge into the landscape of society. (Do our neighbours, colleagues and friends know that we read the Bible every day, and why?) Many brethren and sisters seem to prefer this, because to arouse too strong a reaction would disrupt their lives and plans.

Perhaps we have become too comfortable in our lives; the Kingdom is something we talk about but do not yearn for. The forgiveness of our sins, and our salvation in Christ, no longer humble us and bring us to our knees. No one accuses the Christadelphians of 'turning the world upside down', nor do we appear to have "filled Jerusalem with [our] doctrine" (read your home town for 'Jerusalem') as the apostles and disciples were accused of doing (Acts 17:6; 5:28).

We console ourselves that 'God is calling out a people for His Name' (15:14), that it is 'one here and one there', and therefore it is not totally dependant on us, we should not expect to see vast crowds flocking to our meetings. Yet the age we live in is so far from godliness, so far from true doctrine, so far from Biblical morality, that, if we as individuals and ecclesias lived and acted according to the beliefs we have espoused, the impact on our families, our neighbours, and the communities we inhabit, would be far more dramatic than what we presently achieve.

The uncomfortable truth we have to face is that we lack the faith and the conviction that our beliefs demand of us. Whilst the teaching of Scripture shows that after many years of witness only Noah and his family entered the Ark, and Abraham did not convert the nations of Canaan, their lives were an "answer of a good conscience" (1 Pet. 3:21), they were "preacher[s] of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). They responded to the call of God in faith, and were prepared to be "strangers and pilgrims" (Heb. 11:13), and their lifestyles and actions, while giving witness to the existence of God and His purpose, "condemned the world" (v. 7). We also have to be "persuaded" of these things and "embrace" them (v. 13), so that we give a vibrant and faithful witness in these last days. As Paul exhorted the disciples in Ephesus, we too must "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith [we] are called" (Eph. 4:1).

Children of God

The separateness of our calling, in both doctrine and practice, is becoming blurred. The implications of our doctrines for daily living are being diluted. Whilst in some parts of the world, such as Eastern Europe, Africa, or India, there is a hunger for the Truth, elsewhere apathy, materialism and the subtle inroads of humanism in Western civilization have begun to affect the thinking and attitudes of brethren and sisters.

This is not a new problem. It existed for the believers in the first century who lived in Ephesus. This can be seen in the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians and in the two epistles he wrote to prepare Timothy for his work in the ecclesia at Ephesus. Paul had to remind the brethren and sisters in Ephesus of their high

calling and of the demands it would make on their lives. The similarities between life in Ephesus and our own times are very great. It was a city which had “a form of godliness” (2 Tim. 3:5) in the pagan worship of Diana (or Artemis), whose temple was one of the seven wonders of the world. There was prosperity from it being on the main trading routes; education was a priority with its schools of learning, and sport was a dominant leisure activity. There was also sexual licence, encouraged by the worship of Diana as a fertility goddess, which pervaded all strands of society.

All these various aspects would shape and mould the lives and thinking of those who lived in Ephesus. The gospel called people from this environment and taught them that “they be no gods, which are made with hands” (Acts 19:26). Here is an echo back to Psalm 115:4 and Jeremiah 10:3, and the psalmist goes on to point out that those who build such things become like them: blind, deaf, unable to speak, walk or think for themselves.

The believers in Ephesus had been rescued from this mindless existence, and the language of the epistle emphasises this: “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22-24, NIV). To be created like God it is necessary for God to bring us to a new birth as His children, so we might then grow to be like our heavenly Father, just as a natural child grows to reflect his or her natural parent. Reborn by the water and the spirit Word, we can experience “the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself” (1:5).

The purpose of this is that we might be to the praise and glory of God in this present dispensation as well as in the Kingdom that is to come. We are to be “followers of God, as dear children” (5:1), to become “children of light” (v. 8) in a dark world, and ultimately to grow from childhood into mature adults, to the end that we might be truly part of the new body which grows up “into him . . . which is the head, even Christ” (4:15).

Our position compared with those around us is made very clear by Paul. They are described as “the children of disobedience” (2:2) and as those whose “understanding [is] darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the

ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (4:18). What a stark contrast this presents to us between the children of God and the children of this world! Those who have not been called by God are described as without understanding, ignorant and blind, no matter how nice they may appear in this life, how compassionate or full of good works. Worst of all, they are cut off from that life which God alone can give.

So a great privilege and responsibility lies with those who are now the “children of light”, for we can bring light to those who are in darkness. This is not just attending Sunday meetings, mid-week Bible Classes, fraternal and special efforts, nor supporting campaigns and the mission work overseas, necessary and important as these are. Being conscientious objectors is not something we proclaim just when war is declared; abstaining from voting is not something we do once every five years or whenever an election is called. The doctrines which give rise to those practices should be moulding the attitudes we portray and the choices we make in our daily living all the time. They should be influencing our speech and guiding the choices we make for our children.

The gift of God

The Apostle Paul does not just contrast the position of those in the world with the privileged position believers now hold, lest believers should become puffed up, filled with their own importance and complacent in regard to their responsibilities. What he does through the power of the Spirit is to remind them of what they have been saved from, that this in turn might humble them and motivate them. Ephesians 2 sets this out very clearly, and we have summarised the main points in the [chart](#) opposite, which contrasts the former position of believers, as set out in Ephesians 2:12, with their present position.

The whole purpose of this is, of course, that we might be part of that glorious house, made up of the apostles, the prophets, and the saints of all ages, with Christ as its chief corner stone, the whole a fit dwelling place for God. Such a calling should cause us to bow the knee unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, thankful that we have been enlightened concerning our natural state and the salvation afforded us in Christ. To us have been revealed the secrets of the gospel, of God’s purpose concerning Jew and Gentile, and the glories of the coming Kingdom.

Former position (2:12)	The gift of God
Without Christ	Made nigh by the blood of Christ (2:13)
Aliens from the commonwealth	Fellowcitizens (2:19)
Strangers from the promises	We have obtained an inheritance (1:11)
Without hope	The hope of His calling (1:18)
Without God	Access by one Spirit unto the Father (2:18)

Our Lord warned of the danger of complacency and self-righteousness in the parable recorded in Luke 18:9-14. Two men pray, one a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee thanks God that he is not like other men, that he does not indulge in their excesses, and has regular religious observances. The publican recognises his own unworthiness and humbles himself before his God. We must be like the publican, always aware of our sinful nature, yet grateful for the grace of God extended toward us, and determined to become new people through the influence of His Word and the fellowship we share.

To succeed in this we have to realise that the thinking of the world, the education establishments of our society, the philosophies that underpin and drive business practices, are rarely, if ever, compatible with the mind of God: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9).

A simple illustration from a recent event in Britain helps to demonstrate this. A college in the northeast of England was taken to task for including Creation in its syllabus and not wholeheartedly and single-mindedly promoting evolution. The college had excellent exam results, and passed a government inspection which revealed that Creation was in the syllabus. When this became known, the press, media and famous academics ridiculed the situation, and university professors demanded that the school be re-inspected.

Did we rise up in protest as individuals or as ecclesias at the denigrating of Creation? Did we take the opportunity to counter the evolutionary bandwagon with public addresses and letters to the press, the government and any one else appropriate? Did we support Biblical teaching in discussions in the office or at college? Did we telephone the radio talk shows that discussed

the matter? The question is rhetorical; we know the answer as it applies in our own individual case. Like Paul before us, we should have declared "The Unknown God", Who has granted us salvation (Acts 17:23).

"Sealed unto the day of redemption"

Twice the Apostle Paul reminds his Ephesian readers that those who have been "chosen" (Eph. 1:4), who have been "predestinated . . . unto the adoption of children" (v. 5), those whom God loves and has "quickenened" and "raised . . . up" (2:5,6), are sealed by the power and authority of God Himself (1:13; 4:30). The word "sealed" carries the meaning of 'having the impress of a stamp' for the purpose of security and preservation. We have been marked by God for the purpose of eternal salvation.

Ephesians 4:30 has a reference to the angel that God sent forth to lead His people Israel (Isa. 63:10), and the angels are now under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ to minister to those "who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). To come under the Divine guidance that God affords it is first necessary to hear the Word of truth and to believe the gospel, as Paul specifies in the Ephesians 1:13 reference. Once we have done that, the new man or woman in Christ is then clearly marked out in the sight of God, Christ and the mighty angels as a fellowcitizen "with the saints, and of the household of God" (2:19). To know that should give us all the confidence we need to reorganise our lives and to act in a way which reflects our faith.

To be called in this way and sealed does not give us a guarantee that salvation is ours regardless of what we believe or how we behave thereafter. It is necessary that we hold the faith and heed Paul's warning "that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk" (4:17), because we have been taught the Truth as it is in Jesus (v. 21). The confidence that comes from knowing

that God has loved us and given His Son for the covering of our sins, and has sent His angels to work in our lives, should transform the way we make decisions in life.

All the males in Israel of old were commanded to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem three times a year (Ex. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). There were many reasons why such would not seem a sensible course of action humanly speaking, but if they trusted God and carried out His commands they would not suffer by showing such obedience and faith. Such is the faith that we must display in our daily living. It was the desire of

Paul that God would grant the believers in Ephesus “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints . . . His power to us-ward who believe . . . which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:17-20).

Let us pray that God Who raised His Son from the dead will grant us that strength of faith that when our Master appears he will indeed find we have been worthy of our calling.

“Made nigh by the blood of Christ”

(Eph. 2:13)

The atonement and its influence

Tony Benson

This article seeks to:

- show that the saving work of Jesus Christ is based on the fact that, as one bearing our nature, he was our representative, not our substitute
- establish that this requires us to identify ourselves with him by belief, baptism and a wholehearted attempt to follow his example, that we might be at one with and in him
- expound this idea in Ephesians in relation to the following themes, which represent this great unity:
 - the body
 - the temple
 - the bridegroom and the bride.

ONE OF THE vital issues which separate Christadelphian beliefs from those of Christendom is the atonement, a word which has become a kind of Christadelphian shorthand to indicate God’s work of saving men and women from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. The atonement is in turn closely linked with another such doctrine, the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The link is to be understood as follows. To Christendom Jesus Christ was a Divine being who descended from heaven and was manifest in human form on the earth, giving up his human life in exchange for freeing mankind from the consequences of sin, then resuming his previous Divine existence in heaven. The Christadelphian understanding of Bible teaching about

the matter is that Jesus Christ was truly of our nature, though (and essential to the success of his work) truly Son of God also by the circumstances of his birth. His work of salvation consisted in being perfectly obedient to the will of God, even to the extent of giving himself up to a cruel death upon the cross, where he was our representative, not our substitute. His resurrection to immortality was the result of the foregoing, and was a vital element of his work of salvation; others too could now be raised from the dead and made immortal.

This brings us to another vital doctrine that separates Christadelphians from Christendom: baptism. In order for Jesus Christ’s work of salvation to be effective for a person, that person must first believe and then identify him- or her