New Testament Christianity and the Morality of Racial Segregation

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The concept of segregation is a basic one to the testimony of both the Old and New Testaments. Opposing and complementing the concept of segregation is the concept of unity. It is the purpose of this paper to point out the Biblical record on the distinction between segregation and unity, the spheres to which they apply, and the purpose of their institution.

The first picture that the Bible presents is that the human race as a whole, outside Christ, constitutes a unity. All men have a unity in the fellowship of sin. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." All men have a unity in the nature of their physical existence. "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." All men have a unity in their spiritual death. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." All men have a unity in their need for a Saviour. "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Thus we may conclude that the human race shows a unity in that all men are created with the same source of life, of one blood, by the same Creator, in that all men are under the bondage of sin, and in that all men need the same Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver them from that bondage. There is certainly no basis in the characteristics of human nature to support a principle of segregation.

The dictionary definition of "to segregate" is "to set apart" or "to separate." The Bible has a great deal to say about the "set apart ones," whom we commonly call the sanctified or the saints of God. All through the Biblical record, the people of God, those to whom God comes as Sovereign and Redeemer, have been a segregated people. Israel was a segregated people; Christians today are a segregated people. God is the Author of this segregation. He was the One who called Abram, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." God segregated Abram and his children from the rest of the world. He set them off and separated them unto Himself, that they might be His people and that He might be their God, as He said to Moses. When Pharaoh would not let Israel go, that separation of Israel became visible. The angel of death was sent by God to prove the separation that He had placed between the people of Israel and the people of Egypt. "But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." When God made a covenant with Israel through Moses and established the basis of their relationship, He clearly set forth their segregation: "I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people... And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people."

What was the reason behind this segregation imposed by God? It was not because of the power, the culture, the wealth, the number, or the righteousness of Israel. The Bible gives the answer: God segregated Israel because He loved them and to keep the oath which He swore to Abraham. The basis of the segregation was the sovereign will of God.

The children of God have always been a segregated people by the commandment of God. They are in the world but not of the world. They are the salt and the light -of the world, but they must not be spotted by the world. They are the ambassadors of the kingdom, the minutemen of the King. What was said of Israel, is said also of the New Testament Christians: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." Christians are also a peculiar people unto God, a special, segregated, separated, set apart people. The Old Testament command is repeated to the New Testament church: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."
This segregation of the people of God from the world causes a division in the unity based on human nature. The oneness of the common creatureliness is shattered by the choice of God which raises some to the position of sons of God. God's act of segregating His people leaves the world in two camps, each de-

fined by its attitude toward the Lord Jesus. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." But the segregation -of God's people from the world is for the purpose of creating a new, better, and more perfect unity among His children, a unity evidenced by the common workings of the Holy Spirit. This group of God's people is called by Him the body of Christ, just as important as is God's segregation of His people from the world, so is the unity of His people in Christ. The watchword of the church can be paraphrased: "The body is segregated from the world; but let there be no divisions within the body!"

Paul taught the church at Corinth, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Segregation between God's people and those who are not God's people-and let us emphasize we are speaking of spiritual and not physical segregation-must never be confused with segregation among different groups of God's people. Separation among Christians is abhorrent to God; it is a tearing apart by men of the body -of Christ; it is equivalent to spiritual divorce. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

In His high priestly prayer the Lord Jesus prayed for the unity of the church. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." All those who put their faith in Christ are bound together in as intimate a unity as that which exists between the Father and the Son. The manifestation of this unity to the world by the external actions of the church organization is to be the way that the world is to receive proof of the integrity of Christ.

There have always been problems of distinctions being drawn between members of the household of faith. Whenever they arise, the witness of the New Testament exhorts us to overcome them that true unity may be evident among all those who put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Sovereign. An interesting case history of such distinctions is given in the second chapter of James. It is evident thatthe members of the early church fell victim to the natural tendency of showing greater respect to rich and powerful members of the fellowship than to poor and non-influential members. James soundly rebukes this practice. "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. . . . But if you have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." To place separations between Christians is sin; it is sin if the separation comes because of wealth and power; it is no less sin if the separation comes because of the color of the skin pigments.

In addition to these evidences from the New Testament, we might add one or two more that emphasize beyond all shadow of doubt that saving faith in the Lord Jesus supersedes and removes all possible barriers between men. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all -one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Where there is not Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all. Are we not constrained to add, in the present context, "neither black nor white" to this last verse?

Is there any room for arguing racial characteristics, economic problems, genetic consequences of miscegenation? If we take a stand on the record of the New Testament church and believe God, we must trust Him for the solution of all such problems. As in all aspects of the Christian life, it is but our duty to obey the commandments of God, leaving the fulfillment of His purpose in His hands.

At last there shall be but one body of Christ; Jesus Himself said so. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Those who still attempt to force a separation between the peoples of God will have cause to remember the words of Gamaliel: "But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."
Christianity’s divorce from racial consciousness was both sudden and recent. Only in the 20th century did anti-racial morality infiltrate virtually every mainline Christian organization. By the 1960s, organized Christianity was working hand in hand with organized Judaism to dismantle the South’s self-protective wall of racial hierarchy. One finds national and presumably racial separatism in the New Testament as well. Acts 17:26 reads, [He] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the Earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation. With ministers preaching racial suicide, Christianity may now be more of a threat to our survival than liberalism. At least with liberalism, one recognizes the enemy.