BE YE SEPARATE

High School

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

"Be Ye Separate"

Vacation Bible School Lessons for High School
Written by Brother Danny Hayes

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LESSON ONE

CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY

LESSON TEXT
JOSHUA 24:15

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

LESSON TEXT
Joshua 24:15
15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

In the entire Bible, separation is a theme that is repeated over and over again. In Genesis, we see the patriarchs sojourning in lands that were not their own, but being always mindful not to mix with the people of these lands. Before the exodus, we see the hand of God arranging for His people to be kept separate with the providence of a particular parcel of Egypt on which they could live sequestered from the main population of that country. In allowing the nation of Israel to be held captive, God kept them a separate people that would not mix with the Egyptians, looking to the day that they would go to claim the land of their inheritance. Until the time of the divided kingdom, we see a separated, distinct people. When Israel began mixing with the nations that they had neglected to drive out of the land as God had commanded them, they were sowing the seeds of their demise as a nation.

In the New Testament, Jesus proclaimed His Church as a nation "not of this world." In keeping with the same principle that had been applied to Old Testament Israel, Jesus warned His disciples not to mix with the world, to become and stay a separate, distinct nation of people. The writers of the rest of the New Testament echoed the warning given by Jesus. The reason for this warning is the same as for the caution to the political nation of Israel: To mix with other nations is to stop being a distinct nation of your own. The resulting nation will be different than what already exists and if the nation that already exists ia already what God wants, then anything different will not be what God wants. If the Lord's Church is supposed to be a peculiar people who follow Him and do His will, then what could the result possibly be if it mixes with other people who do not follow God?

What would be the result if a breeder of fine, show-quality Labrador retrievers were to let cocker spaniels into his pens? Would the resulting puppies be accepted at a dog show? They certainly wouldn't qualify for "Best of Breed." If, as the Bible clearly states, the world and God, His goals and objectives are opposed to each other, then does it not follow that the world should also be opposed to God's people, their goals and objectives? If

this is then the case, does it not then also follow that for God's people to be wrapped up in the world is for them to oppose God?

Our study in this series of lessons is aimed toward us becoming and staying one of God's people and separating ourselves from those things that would cause us to become indistinct and not what God wants us to be.

CHOICES

Every day we are faced with choices. From the time that we are aware of the alarm clock going off we have decisions to make. Many of our choices do not have far reaching consequences. It really doesn't matter whether we drink orange juice or grape juice with our breakfast and the effects of our choice really only extends to how it will taste to us. There are many other choices, however, that we are presented with on a daily basis that are quite serious in scope.

The consequences of the decisions that we make on these choices may extend to how we are viewed by others around us for a long time. If you choose not to pay attention to your girlfriend's or boyfriend's birthday, it would likely hurt their feelings and make them think less of you. They might not treat you as kindly as you would like to be treated. Some of these decisions that we make may not even be noted by another person right away, but may cause us to be faced with more decisions that could affect our entire lives. If a man decides that having loads of money is the most important thing in the world to him, then that may lead him to decide in favor of theft or murder in order to have more money. The decisions that flow from that initial decision that no one else in the world would know about could possibly end in personal disaster for that man as well as others.

Keep in mind that the consequences that we've described here can be traced back to a single point in time. In a single moment, we are capable of making choices that can change the course of our entire lives. Once we have made a choice, we can never make that choice again. We may get an opportunity to make a similar decision at some later time, but we can never un-make that choice and change it. Bearing these things in mind, we see that many of the choices that we make quickly and perhaps with little thought are very serious and should be gravely considered before we opt one way or the other. Adding to the seriousness of our consideration is the fact that so many of these choices also have spiritual ramifications that could affect us and others in eternity!

PREPARATION FOR DECISIONS

Men and women spend years in prestigious business schools and working in businesses learning to make good decisions in handling billions of dollars in resources. Others spend as much time learning to make decisions that will result in victory on battlefields. Still others spend many years learning to protect people's health and save lives. When the decisions that we make

can affect souls for eternity, does it not make sense that we should seek to be properly equipped to make the correct decisions? With so much riding on so many of the decisions that we make, it makes sense that we should learn how to make them. The book of Proverbs discusses making choices such as these. Proverbs 4:7 says "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

Making such important decisions requires true wisdom, but how do we go about getting it? Psalm 111:10 says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments..." This fear of God is a reverential fear. It is fear to be sure, because to have some inkling of His infinite power and might is to tremble with fear. It is a natural thing to be so overwhelmed by it, especially when realizing our own insignificance, but there is also a component of awed respect, even of the desire to please Him, to seek His favor.

It is here where wisdom begins, because when we have this type of fearful attitude we are likely to make a momentous decision. When we fear God in this way, we will choose to seek Him. What could be a wiser decision at this point? This is why this fear is called the beginning of wisdom. It is the beginning of preparation for eternity as well as for the rest of life.

Of course, just deciding to seek God is not enough. Remember that this is just the beginning of wisdom. The real importance is not in the seeking, but in the finding. It's important to note that our finding God is not our decision, but His. We must come to Him humbly, begging Him for His mercy and salvation. We must surrender to Him completely and depend upon Him to graciously accept us.

When He has accepted us and made us one of His, we have a wonderful fellowship with Him and the promise of help in all situations, even death. Just being saved is not enough, though. Remember that at salvation we have only passed the beginning of wisdom. Among all of the helps that God's children can receive in this life is to be increased in God's wisdom. God can lead His people with great wisdom, but He also imparts this wisdom to them. When a saved person draws and keeps himself close to God and delights in and meditates upon His word all the time, he gains wisdom.

This wisdom is intended to be used to serve God and when someone loves God and His cause, he desires to use this wisdom for that purpose. The person who has this wisdom sees that keeping God's commandments is necessary to please Him. Thus, it takes on a circular pattern: The closer we draw to God, the more wisdom we gain; the more wisdom that we gain, the closer we draw to God.

The upshot of all of this is that this wisdom is something that we need when it comes time to make each of these decisions that we talked about earlier. If we haven't spent much time with God and haven't gained much of

His wisdom, then we are less well equipped for making the all-important choices that come upon us each day. If we have it, however, then we have a wonderful resource that we can draw upon at times when a choice lies before us.

AWARENESS

The first step in being able to make a wise decision is to be aware that there is a decision to be made. Before we can see all the choices that come upon us through each day, we must know at the start of the day that they await us. It's sort of like walking down a railroad track. If we know that a train may come and come fast, we know to watch for them and plan ahead to not be caught unawares. If we aren't aware of the possibility of a train, we might walk along in blissful ignorance until we realize too late that this fast steel beast has us trapped in a tunnel or on a rail bridge with no place to go.

It can be the same with these choices. If we don't know they are coming, they can overtake us seemingly before we know it and we will find ourselves having reacted without really knowing what has just happened. Often when this scenario is played out, we find that we have made the wrong choice without having been aware that we were making a choice at all. Frequently in these situations, we have hemmed ourselves in by allowing ourselves to be swept along until we are almost forced into a decision that is between bad and worse.

There are a multitude of sins that good people have fallen into simply because they were not aware that such a string of choices would be brought before them and each decision brought the next about so fast that they suddenly found themselves too far into the tunnel to avoid the train. How many times has a girl allowed herself to be swept off her feet by a boy that showed the signs of having less than good character and found herself in trouble almost before she knew it? How many boys have found themselves calling parents from a police station when they only started out with the intention of having a good time but with no caution about how they had it?

It is important for us to have some inkling of how many ways that we can get into a tight spot and to avoid anything that looks like one of those ways. It is good to look around and see the trouble that others have gotten into and learn from each case how to stay out of similar trouble. It is a good thing when parents use examples such as these to teach their children and equip them to avoid trouble before it starts. It is good for all of us to confess our sins to one another not only so that we can seek the prayers of each other, but so that we can learn the pitfalls that trapped others and avoid them. It is best to never enter the tunnel, but we have to be able to recognize the tunnel for what it is before we know to avoid it.

KEEPING YOUR WITS

Of course, just knowing where the danger lies is not enough. We then have to steer clear of it. This sounds

easy, but is not always so. The thing that makes this so difficult for us is that so very often, the danger is attractive to us. Satan is always at work and he knows exactly what we like. One person may have a weakness for taking things that don't belong to him. Another may have a problem with telling lies. We all have things that Satan can lure us with and we should be sure that he most certainly will use them.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that temptations are just general and are not targeted specifically with each of us in mind. Satan is a master of direct advertising; he knows just what to present each of us with and how much subtlety to use. He knows the times and conditions where we are weakest. He is patient. He will wait until the right moment and dangle the thing that is most tempting to us in the most tempting way.

Not only is it important that we are aware that this temptation is coming, but it is also vitally important that when the moment comes we stay focused upon what we are supposed to be about. At these times, we need to be calm, rational, and not allow our flesh to take control of us. This is a hard thing to do. Our flesh pulls against us all the time, wanting to take the low road of ease, pleasure, and impulsiveness. Our flesh wants to follow instincts that do not require thought and reason.

Here also as with awareness, God will help us if we only let Him. In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus warned of persecutions yet to come, but also told of God's help. In the 19th and 20th verses, He said "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." In every temptation, in every trying situation that God's people find themselves in, He stands ready to help them if they hold on to Him.

It is important that we spend time in prayer every day and keep that prayerful attitude all the time. Then when Satan puts a temptation before us, we have God right beside us where we have kept Him all along. When Satan puts easy pickings right in front of a person who is easily tempted with theft and tells him that he'd better hurry before someone comes, he has God making him know that this is something that he needs to ignore. When Satan puts someone displaying an attitude right before the man with a quick temper, he has God saying "Peace, be still." It is important to try to stay calm in all these situations, but with our flesh being what it is and having our own inherent weakness, keeping God close to us is truly a sure way of keeping our wits in all situations.

RE-ITERATIONS

Bad choices always seem to breed more bad choices. If a person chooses to lie about something, usually more lies are required somewhere down the line. If a person does something wrong, say robs a bank and gets his picture on wanted posters, it makes

it really hard to apply for an honest job. Thus, a single robbery can turn into a life of crime. As a matter of fact, it appears that a progression of bad choices serves to box a person in, taking away many of his choices. Everybody likes to keep their options open, but making bad choices closes one door after another. For an example of this one-thing-leads-to-another effect, read Romans 1:20-32. There is a point in that scripture where God actually gives people over to making even worse choices. If we ever get to the point that God is not even striving with us to try to keep us from making bad choices, we're sunk.

Not so with good decisions. Good choices really do keep our options open. When we make good choices, the next choice down the line is not from a bad position created by our last choice. The next choice is not between bad and worse. It's between good and bad and we again have the choice to shun evil. That's the upside. The downside to this is that we have to keep making choices. Of course, given the progression from Romans chapter 1, this is not really a down side. If having choices to make is a problem, then it's a good problem. But it's not good enough to make a good choice and let that be it. We have to keep making those good choices over and over again.

That's why the title of our lesson was chosen. It is the same wording as in the lesson text from Joshua and says "Choose you this day." It says "this day." Now the day that Joshua said this was thousands of years ago, but the statement is as valid as it ever was and is said as much to us as it was said to the children of Israel. If the imperative statement was said to us, then "this day" does not just refer to the time that Joshua stood and said it. It also means today. The command is to all of us right now as we read it. It will mean NOW when tomorrow gets here. It means NOW no matter what time we find ourselves in. It means that we are to choose THIS day whom we will serve.

If we are to keep ourselves separated from the world, then it is important that at all times in our lives, we must choose to turn away from the god of this world and at the same time choose to serve God.

In our next lesson, we are presented with the perfect model for making good choices – Jesus.

LESSON TWO

BE CHRIST-LIKE

LESSON TEXT
Romans 6:4

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

LESSON TEXT
Romans 6:4
4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

As has been stated many times, Jesus is our role model. While on Earth, He was in all ways a perfect man. He was virtuous, moral, loving, spiritual, wise, helpful, close to God, and perfect in all those capacities. He was also perfect in holiness, which is a quality of being set apart or separated for a godly purpose. Jesus was our model for maintaining the perfect separateness from the world.

Properly separating ourselves from the world is a difficult thing to do. We cannot achieve the correct balance by ourselves. We are not that wise. It would be so much easier if we could find a place to go and shun the rest of the world as some men have tried to do with monasteries and communes. Those kinds of methods, however, are not consistent with the commandment that Jesus gave to His church. How can we go into all the world while we are staying in our own little place and keeping the world locked outside? In His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed thus to God: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world ....As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." (John 17:15,18) It is clear that we are not to seek to go away from the world because Jesus has sent us into it.

On the other hand, how can we go into all the world and be separated from it? We need to look to Jesus. Did Jesus close Himself off from the world? Not only did He not do that, He went out into the world, seeking lost souls and those who would make up His church.

A HOLY BODY

Jesus kept Himself pure in body. How did He do this? Before His death, Jesus did not have His glorified body. His flesh was much the same as ours. It was subject to the same temptations as ours are, yet there is one difference. Hebrews 4:15 says that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Remember what we talked about in the last lesson? Jesus always made the right choice. He put His flesh completely in submission to His spirit and to His God's will.

How many of us have ever fasted for 40 days? Jesus did. Could any of us endure the torture that Jesus did when He was crucified, much less do

it without a whimper as He did? Jesus controlled His flesh because He did not let it have one bit of control over Him. He knew that His spirit was His real self. When we think of ourselves, we think in terms of hair, eyes, nose, ears, height, weight, and many other characteristics that deal with our bodies, but that is not who we are, or it certainly shouldn't be.

We are eternal beings who are made in the image of God. When Genesis says that we are made in His image, it's not talking about our bodies. Remember that God had already formed Adam's body from dust. Adam's body was not a radical departure from many of the animals that had already been created. It had skin like most of them. It had hair like many did. It had limbs, a head with a brain, eyes, ears and mouth like many of them did. It had all kinds of internal systems for preserving and replicating itself as did the animals.

So at this time, God had created the body of a very high order mammal. The next thing is what makes man special. Genesis 2:7 says that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." This body that God had created became the vessel that carried traits of God. We are His offspring. This soul is the real us. It will exist eternally. We will always have a self-identity and be aware. The animal body that we wear is something that we will each shuck off, but the real us will remain. That being said, how much importance should we attach to this flesh that is only going to last several decades at the most?

Jesus placed importance upon His flesh that was due it only as a vehicle. It was the tool that His spirit used to accomplish those things that His spirit knew were needful, namely things of an eternal value. Our cars are really just utilitarian machines. They are things that get us from here to there. We put gas and oil in them. We maintain them so that they will keep getting us from here to there. If they start doing something that affects how well they accomplish this task, we get it fixed. If Jesus paid attention to His flesh, it was to take care of the tool that He had been given to use in doing God's work. If His flesh was tempted to do something that would hinder God's work, He put that temptation away from him.

A holy, separated body is one that does not control it's owner, but is disciplined to do God's work.

A HOLY ATTITUDE

Jesus had the right frame of mind for living in this world. He was properly separate from the world. He went to the sinners, and yet did not take part in their sin, convincing them of their need to turn away from the world and turn to His Father. He did not adhere to the conventional wisdom of the day, but lived by and taught the wisdom of God. He did not have a part in the winds of violence blowing through Palestine during His life, but He did demonstrate force in defending the purity of God's house.

In Matthew 5:2-11, Jesus laid out some traits that He considered to be very important. Read this passage of

scripture to find out what Jesus said. These are traits that would set a person apart from the rest of the world. In fact, He described a person having each of these traits as blessed. "Blessed" means supreme happiness and there are not many people in the world who have this. Jesus put forth these traits as the ideal for living. Jesus was, however, not only teaching these ideals with His words, He was teaching them every day with His life. Jesus' values and attitudes were reflected in what He said in this sermon that He preached.

Think about these characteristics and think what a person would be like who took these words and built his life upon them. He wouldn't be your average, everyday person would he? Where would his focus be? It would be upon God and His word and His work. It would be upon his fellowman. He would be following the two great commandments that Jesus gave in Mat. 22:37 & 39 where he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

If a person displayed these traits as Jesus did, he would be blessed or happy as Jesus said that He would, but he would also be separated from the rest of the world. He would attend first to the things of God. He might have hobbies and interests, but God would be more important to him than anything of this world. God would be his constant companion and help. He would depend upon God and follow Him where ever He led him.

Much of what we do in life is governed by our attitude and following God is no different. Our attitude should be what Jesus' attitude was. He was here on earth because He loved mankind, but His first love was God. A separated attitude is one that loves God first and then puts everything else after that.

HOLY REGARDING POSSESSIONS

"And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Luke 9:58) The only record that we have of material possessions that Jesus owned was when the soldiers gambled for His garments when He was crucified. Why? Jesus had command of the resources of the universe. When His disciples needed money to pay taxes, Jesus had them go catch a fish that He said would have money in its mouth and that's exactly what happened. Jesus knew where riches were and could have commanded all of nature to bring it to Him, but He didn't. All we read about is this one fish with a piece of money in its mouth. Jesus could have been wealthy. He could have come to the world as a great, powerful person but He didn't. Why?

It's true that Jesus came as an ordinary man. It's true that He did not come to sway people to Him by impressing them with wealth and power but with the word of God. Couldn't He have at least had a house? Of course, in what we read of Jesus' ministry, He was always traveling. It doesn't seem that He had time to settle down. The most obvious point is

that He wasn't on Earth to put down roots, so a house would have meant little to Him. In fact, it seems that just about any material possessions that Jesus had would not have helped His mission here and so were useless to Him.

Jesus did not condemn the ownership of material goods. Zacchaeus said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." (Luke 19:8) He didn't say that he was giving everything away, only half, and still Jesus said in response, "This day is salvation come to this house..." (v. 9) However, Jesus recognized that material wealth usually does make it difficult for a person to see his spiritual need before God. Read Luke 18:18-30 to see what happened and what Jesus said about a man who placed more importance on his riches than he did on finding God.

This is the key to the whole matter. Possessions can be great blessings if we use them wisely but great curses if we put them before God. If we put things before God, then they are in our way and become great hindrances to us. Possessions never made anyone happy and if we think that they will, we are putting too much importance upon them. We may enjoy using them, but we should never depend upon them for our happiness. If Jesus had owned things, those things would have had to be tended to and would have taken time from the great work that He was here to accomplish, hindering Him. If our possessions are hindering us from serving God, then we need to do as Jesus told the ruler in Luke 18 and divest ourselves of them.

The world and its followers seek to always gain more. Movies, commercials, TV shows, billboards, printed ads, and a multitude of other things encourage us all to always be thinking about ways to make more money and then to spend it on things that are presented as being the key to great joy and contentment. As soon as those messages fade, however, another one pops up that says, "but you need this too!" This is a twisted, false message and we need to ignore it and listen to God.

A person for whom material gain is not important is a great oddity to the world. This is separation, but not necessarily the right kind. Only when the desire for material gain is foregone in favor of God and His cause can separation of the kind that Jesus displayed be achieved. Being separated in possessions is having God and His love and favor as our most precious possession.

HOLY IN SPIRIT

Jesus was separated in spirit from the rest of the world. As has already been stated, He loved God. This is the requirement for us to be separated in spirit like Jesus was. It is the first requirement for a separated life. Jesus, being God, was separate in spirit from His birth. We are not like that since we carry the sin of Adam with us from the moment that we come into being. Because of that sin, we find ourselves separated not

from the world, but from God.

It is important that as soon as we realize that this separation exists that we, as was said in the first lesson, make the choice to seek God. We cannot be truly separated from the world without being joined to God and this happens in spirit. Our spirit is then made new, becoming as the spirit of Jesus, and is separated from the filth that pervaded our old spirit. We have the beginnings for being completely separated from the world and Satan.

It is important what we do from this point because our new spirit that has been placed in our bodies by Jesus has the capability to affect everything else, but we have to allow that to happen. In our next lesson, we'll be talking about this new spirit and how we choose whether or not to give it control of our hearts.

LESSON THREE

KEEP THY HEART

LESSON TEXT
PROVERBS 4:23

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

LESSON TEXT
Proverbs 4:23
23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Our lesson deals with the heart of man. The term "heart" is used in all sorts of ways. Of course in physical terms, it is the blood pumping organ in each of our chests. But it is used in all sorts of emotional and meta-physical ways. The Bible too, speaks of the heart in many places and that is what we are concerned with here.

Judging by how many times the Bible refers to the heart of man and what it says about the heart, we come to understand that the heart is a vitally important part of man. In Matt. 15:18-19, Jesus states that the heart is the source of all things that defile a man. This would indicate that the heart has a great deal of power over who we are and what we become. Jesus said that when all these things are committed (evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies), they originate in the heart.

This would explain why our lesson text tells us to protect our hearts. If the heart is the part of us that influences our actions, then it would make sense to cultivate our heart for desired results, would it not? This is what the writer of Proverbs is telling us. As important a role as our hearts play in the scope of how our lives are lived, we need to try to determine exactly what we need to do to "keep" our hearts.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SPIGOT

Have you ever heard the saying "nature abhors a vacuum?" It seems to be true. Take a bottle, suck the air out of it, and put a stopper or even your finger in it. What you have in that bottle is a relative vacuum. The air inside the bottle isn't as dense as the air on the outside. With a good stopper, you may be able to hold the vacuum this way for many years. But what happens when you remove the stopper? What do you hear? Was it the sound of air squeaking past the stopper? What just happened?

There wasn't as much air inside the bottle as out and the pressure inside was lower, so when you take out the stopper, the lower pressure bottle sucks air in until the pressure is the same on the inside and the outside. This is where the saying came from. It seems that nature hates the vacuum so much that it will very quickly fill the vacuum with something so that it will not be a vacuum any more. In other words, the open bottle must be full of something. It cannot contain

nothing. If we can suddenly clear everything out of the bottle, nature will just fill it up with the most readily available thing that it has.

If we have a bottle that we have gotten to hold lemonade, then lemonade is the only thing that we want in the bottle. We do not want air, water, cranberry juice, or mud in the bottle. The best way to only have lemonade in our bottle is to fill it up with lemonade. Then there is no room for anything else. As long as we keep the bottle full, nothing else will be in our bottle. As a matter of fact, if we can pressurize our bottle so that the pressure inside is higher than the pressure outside, then nothing will be able to get in for sure because then the relative vacuum is on the outside. Even if our bottle is not sealed perfectly in this case, some of the lemonade might get out, but nothing else will come in.

Our hearts are much the same as our bottle. The nature in which our heart operates is the same as the nature of our world in this respect. It abhors a vacuum. Our hearts must be full of something. Just as the bottle will fill with air if nothing else is available, our hearts will fill up with whatever is available if they are emptied. That's why it is important that we carefully guard what is in our hearts. It is vital that we see that our hearts are filled with the right things.
Let's look at some strategies for filling our hearts and their possible outcomes.

G-I-G-O

GIGO is an acronym for an old computer programmer's saying. The saying is "Garbage In, Garbage Out." The original meaning was that if you put bad data into a computer, then what the computer does with that data will be useless. You can extend this thought to many things. If you try to make a chair out of rubber bands, you may not want to sit on it. If you make a chocolate milkshake out of mud, it won't be edible. The idea can also extend to our hearts.

If we fill our hearts with junk, we will have lives that are "junked up." If we watch movies, read books, and play video games that glorify violence, we will see that same violence coming out in various ways in our own lives. It may actually be in physical violence acted out upon other people. It may only be in words, perhaps writing our own stories or praising violence to others. It may only be in our thoughts and apparent to no one else, but our hearts will be affected by this.

If we eat food that is bad for us, our physical health will be affected. Likewise, if we take in the wrong ideas, images, and actions, it is a most decidedly heart-unhealthy diet.

N-I-G-O

NIGO is a twist on GIGO. "Nothing In, Garbage Out." We can't fix the garbage situation by just being neutral and not taking anything into our hearts. Remember about the vacuum? Our hearts will fill themselves without our participation, so doing

nothing is not an option. Why is this not an option? How much could you count on your heart being filled with the right things if you just do nothing and go with the flow? What if your car needed gas? Would it be an intelligent strategy to just open the gas cap and just take whatever happened to flow in there? What would you end up with? In all likelihood, air would be all you'd end up with, but whatever else went into your tank, it probably wouldn't run your car.

As important as our heart is, do we want to leave to chance that it will be filled with the right things?

A NEW G-I-G-O

Here's a new saying for an old acronym: "God in, godliness out." Everybody wants a life that is worth living. Everybody wants to be happy. As our last lesson taught, the key to happiness is putting God first, both in our soul and in our lives.

So how do we get God into our heart? The Bible gives excellent advice. James tells us "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (Jam 1:5) In Jas 4:8, he says "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." In 1Thes 5:17, Pauls says, "Pray without ceasing." The entire Bible is a treasure trove of instruction on how to fill our hearts and also of material with which to fill it. The main thing is that we allow God to fill it.

With salvation, we have a source for God to fill up our hearts and even pressurize them so that no evil can get in. Not only is our heart protected, but a pressurized heart tends to send its contents into the area surrounding it, just as the pressurized bottle that we talked about earlier would do.

AN UNCULTIVATED HEART OR A PRECIOUS TREASURE

A heart is something that God has given us to cultivate. If we had a field to cultivate, we would have a choice on what to do with it. We could just let it lie and allow it to go untended. When this happens, the changes that we see at first are subtle. We may see a weed here or there growing a little higher than the rest of the field, but it doesn't look too alarming to someone who really doesn't care about the field. After a while, there may seem to be another crop of weeds that has sprung up. Some time later it would become obvious that these other weeds are briars that have become rather large bushes. The field now looks dramatically different than it did at first, but the careless observer has grown accustomed to the look of it and does nothing. At last, saplings begin to grow among the briars and bushes and after many years of neglect, the field has become a thicket that is capable of growing nothing of value.

But if a field is taken care of, it can produce bountifully for as long as the caretaker can use it. Many people can get the benefit of such a field because it can produce much more than is needed for just the person tending it.

Our hearts are much the same way. If we leave our hearts to grow wildly, they will end up choked with the results of what we have allowed to grow there unchecked. Our lives will reflect that neglect and will be good for nobody. With the heart choked so, there will be no room for happiness. With the life so choked, there will be no fruit, such as a witness of salvation, that might benefit other people.

But a heart that is full of God is a merry, satisfied place. How peaceful is the man who has God dwelling not just in his spirit, but also in his heart. God's word flows from his heart to his life and then to the world at large. This man has a productive field that can benefit others. One person may benefit from the love that flows from his heart and blossoms into helping actions. Another may benefit from the truth that flows from his heart and becomes the fruit of the gospel. This man has separated his heart from the rest of the world to keep from being changed by it and then when his heart has been filled with God and his word, goes to the world in order to change it.

In our next lesson, another way that we keep separated, avoiding evil.

LESSON FOUR

ABSTAIN FROM EVIL

LESSON TEXT
1 THESSALONIANS 5:22

WRITTEN BY
BROTEHR DANNY HAYES

LESSON TEXT
1 Thessalonians 5:22
22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Do we know what evil is? Here is the definition from the American Heritage Dictionary:
1-The quality of being morally bad or wrong; wickedness. 2-That which causes harm, misfortune, or destruction; 3- An evil force, power, or personification.; 4-Something that is a cause or source of suffering, injury, or destruction

We probably all think we can recognize evil when we see it. When asked about examples of evil, people will usually name Hitler or bin Laden. We will talk about drug dealers hanging around school yards or terrorists plotting to blow up unsuspecting victims. Murderers, rapists, drunk drivers, spouse and child abusers, thieves, and snipers all come to mind. But is this all? Are we only looking at the extreme examples? Where is the line drawn? What is evil?

The definition above is true, but it leaves something out. Evil is born of sin and sin is anything that is contrary to God. That puts evil into a whole new light. Evil defined in this way could even include us. Very few of us who are asked to give examples of evil will mention ourselves, but should we? How many of us have ever told a lie that hurt someone else? How many of us has said unkind, unnecessary things to someone else? Have we ever taken anything that wasn't ours? Dishonored our parents in any way? How many of us have ever turned away from God?

The truth is that evil is the human condition. It is the way of the world. There may be some manifestations of evil that to us seem worse than others, but all evil is the result of sin unchecked and sin is what the world is full of. What then should be our course of action if we are to be separated from the world? Should we not attempt to avoid evil? To keep ourselves from evil is another way of keeping ourselves set apart. It is at the same time a pursuit of the holy standard of God.

In this lesson, we'll look at the effects of sin and evil to show why we should separate ourselves from them. We'll also look at some of the things that the Bible says about avoiding evil.

EVIL AND OURSELVES

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal 6:7) This concept should not be foreign to any

of us. We are all familiar with cause and effect. If we do something, we expect that there will be some outcome. If we cut a tree, it will fall. If we drop a fragile glass, it will hit the floor and shatter. If we don't leave our bicycles in the rain, it will prevent them from rusting.

With all of our experience with cause and effect, we shouldn't have any problem with the concept of reaping what we sow. The fact is that each of us every day is planting seeds. They may be good seeds or they may be bad. We are also harvesting every day. The usual idea is of a harvest sometime in the far-away future and while that is true, we also harvest right now. Why did the student make a good grade on a test? The good grade was because he took the time to read and study the material that was going to be on the test. It is the same with good and evil.

What is the likely result of betraying a friend's confidence and telling everyone a secret that they had entrusted to you? Isn't it likely that when that friend finds out, she won't ever trust you again? What would make you do something like that? Is betrayal a good quality or an evil one? If we find ourselves susceptible to doing things like this, it is an indication that we have too much sin in our lives.

What about other, more extensive evil? What if you choose to hold up a convenience store? What would be the outcome? A term in prison is a definite possibility, but what if you got away with it? What if there were no consequences as far as society was concerned? Do you think you would be scot-free? Proverb 5:22 says "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." Your own sins would literally bind you. You would find yourself a little more in bondage to your own sin. What does this mean?

If a person didn't get caught, he would feel that there were no consequences. He would be emboldened to try doing the evil act again. He is being drawn in. He will keep doing the evil that he committed until he is caught or even until he does something even worse. All the while, he is becoming more and more evil and piling up a stack of IOU's that he is going to have to pay someday. Remember Galations 6:7. "God is not mocked." There will be a harvest. For those who have done wickedly, it will be a bitter one.

God's people do not want to find themselves taking part in this bitter harvest. Besides being unpleasant, it is the harvest of the world, of those who oppose God. We do not need to fool ourselves into thinking that because we are saved, we are shielded from reaping the bitter fruit of this harvest. Remember that David, after he had sinned with Bathsheba and then had arranged to have her husband killed, paid a heavy price. His child died soon after birth and God told him that violence would follow his family though his life. Saved people have been pardoned and cleansed of the sin that our souls carry from Adam. Their souls are eternally secure, but their lives can be destroyed by the

weight of the sins that they commit willfully after their souls have been made a new creature.

If God's people have sold themselves into bondage by their own wickedness, they are good for nothing in God's work. Why would God want a person who lives just like the rest of the world to tell a lost person of a better way? Wouldn't He want someone for that task who, while not perfect, is an example of someone who delights in God and His word and earnestly desires to follow His law?

It is important for us to stay separate by not engaging in the evil of the world so that our lives can be an example to others, perhaps even to those to whom we never say a word.

EVIL AND OTHERS

Even with all of the bad effects that reaping of bad seeds can have on us, it might be easier to bear if we knew that it only affected us. At least we would know that we deserved what ever we got. But what if the harvest affected those who had nothing to do with planting those bad seeds. The fact is, the harvest that we've talked about can indeed affect more that just us. Remember that David lost his child, but it was the child who died. The infant died as a direct result of the evil that David had committed.

How many people have we injured through our evil actions? How many have been hurt because we lied, backstabbed, coveted, hated, lusted, envied, became proud and boastful, disobeyed, and/or a host of other evils? This is not the way that God intended for it to be. He intended that people would love Him and serve Him and love each other. But people listened to Satan, who is the inventor of evil.

Think of all of the millions of people who have been murdered over the centuries by evil men who characterized their actions as good and moral. Think of all of the people who very well may have gone to hell thinking that they would be saved because they had followed evil men, themselves followers of Satan. Men who had perpetuated the lie that there is another way to heaven besides the simple plan brought by God's people throughout time.

Think of all of the children who suffer because evil men seek to make fortunes by peddling child pornography. They put forth their philosophy that it is ok and natural and draw people into their evil, creating those who prey upon the most helpless of us. Think about the evil men in foreign countries and our own who have built empires upon the broken bodies of the drug addicts that they helped to addict in order to create a market for their evil products.

Do we want to put ourselves in the same camp as these people, who have turned wholeheartedly to the things of this world? God's people should desire to put distance between themselves and anyone who does evil. We should not want to be part of something that enslaves men. We should not want to be part of something that is so destructive.

We should not want to be responsible for a terrible harvest of sin that would come down upon us or anyone else. But most of all, we should not want to take part in something, anything, that God hates.

AVOIDING EVIL

Remember in our first lesson where we talked about being prepared and recognizing choices between good and bad? It's much the same with evil. Our sinful flesh has a predisposition to go in the wrong direction and to take little notice of evil when we are presented with it. It is important, therefore, that we spend time and meditation in learning to recognize it. We need to be ready when it is presented to us.

Satan is very subtle. He's not going to have someone come to us and say, "Hey, would you like to go set off a dirty bomb and kill thousands of innocent people?" Great evil comes about in very small increments and is only the result of thousands of tiny, almost imperceptible compromises where one gradually sells himself. It would be more likely that someone would ask you to buy into lies that he would later use to justify the use of dirty bombs for a cause. If we are not aware, we may allow ourselves to be drawn in to a position where evil doesn't look so bad to us.

By avoiding evil and the evil fruit that it produces, we hold ourselves separate from the world and hold ourselves unto God. We may be reviled and ridiculed, but that is of little importance when God is on our side. As Paul said in Roman 8:31, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

In our next lesson, we look forward to the final separation that will render worry and care over our first four lessons outdated and unnecessary.

LESSON FIVE

FINALLY SEPARATE

LESSON TEXT
MATTHEW 25:31-34

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

LESSON TEXT
Matthew 25:31-34
31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:
32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:
33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.
34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Attaining and maintaining separation from the world is hard work. It takes time and effort. It requires patience and prayer. We must give it attention and care. These things are required because the natural state of the world and we who live in it is in opposition to God.

But God's people look forward to a time when all of that will be changed. Hebrews 4:9 says "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." There is coming a time when God will grant to His people an eternal peace. At that time, we will truly be separate, but with no effort on our part.

In this lesson, there will be temporal terms used such as "time", "before", "after", "when", and others that really do not apply when we are speaking in terms of eternity. Words truly fail us, because we do not have language that adequately explains the nature of it. These words are used only because there's not another way to express what we are trying to cover.

REVELATION OF THE SEPARATED

There will be an end to time. At some point in the future, no one knows how soon, God will see that all things have come to pass and time and evil has become full. It will then be time for time to end. Only God can declare this. He created time and the universe and He will bring it all to an end. It will be the end of the space that He has allotted for man to repent and come to Him. It will be the point at which that space will be swept away and only eternity will exist.

At that time, it will be as the parable of the wheat and the tares in Mat. 13:24-30. Read this parable. Jesus told of a farmer who had planted wheat, but an enemy came in the night and sowed tares (a weed) all over the field of wheat. The tares began to sprout with the wheat and the farmer noticed them. The farmer's servants asked if he wanted them to go pull up the tares, but the farmer in wisdom, said

that both plants should be allowed to grow to maturity, when the differences between them would be most apparent. It was then, at harvest, that the tares would be gathered and set aside and then the wheat could be gathered in unhampered.

The farmer, as was said, was wise. He knew that at the time of harvest, the fullness of the mature tares would show themselves to be what they were. After the tares were removed, the wheat would then be revealed to be the true harvest, that for which the farmer had sowed. We don't know what a tare looked like, but we know that it must have been easy to tell the mature tare from the wheat.

God's people will be revealed in a similar way according to our lesson text. They will be set apart from those who have attached themselves to the world.

THE GOATS

In our lesson text, the goats represent the unsaved. Why goats? Goats are intelligent, affectionate, lovable creatures. When you see a baby goat, you want to hug it. Goats will often come right up to you and make noises as if they are trying to communicate with you. Why would the unsaved be represented by goats?

Goats represent the unsaved because, despite all of their charming features, are self-willed, stubborn animals. To try to make a goat do something that he does not want to do is an exercise in frustration. Often, it seems that the only thing that determines what a goat wants to do is if it's what you do not want him to do. This may seem funny as we read this, but it is a trait that God does not value. Why? Because God is perfect. His way is always the right way. If a person wants to go any other way than the way that is right, he is not going God's way. Just like the goat that wants to go back when we want them to go forward, the sinner wants to go the wrong way when God wants them to go the right way.

God will take these unrepentant, stubborn, obstinate people and remove them from among His people. He will put them on His left hand. There is a reason that they are put on the left hand. The left hand is symbolic of disfavor. God is showing that he does not favor these people by putting them on His left hand.

This is bad enough, but what comes next for the goats is the worst possible thing imaginable. Looking past our lesson text to verse 41, God tells the goats, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:..." What a terrible thing to hear from the only One who is able to save you. Then these people who never turned away from the world and toward God will be swept away. They are to experience destruction eternally but never be consumed – everlasting destruction.

This number will include all sorts of people. Of course, we would expect the wicked to be there. Rev 21:8 refers to the "abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sor-

cerers, and idolaters, and all liars...," but it also says "the fearful, and unbelieving..." That could include a lot of people who we don't necessarily think of as wicked people. It could be the nice man at the department store or one of our teachers. It could be a member of our family. It could even be someone that we've always thought of as religious.

In Matthew 7:22-23, Jesus said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

What God is looking at is the soul, and these people have never had theirs changed by submitting themselves to Him. They still have the same nature that they were born with. They have the nature that they inherited from Adam – the nature of the goat. Their nature is rebellious toward God. They are already the goats that are destined for the left hand of God.

THE SHEEP

On the right hand of God, we see the sheep. The sheep represent the saved people of all ages. Why sheep? Sheep are smelly, aloof creatures that show good evidence of being dumb. They are easily killed by predators, are bad about disowning their young, and easily lose their way. What would there be about sheep that would be so appealing to God?

Sheep represent the saved because they are so willing to be led. It is as if they see their shortcomings and realize that if they are to survive, they need a shepherd. They learn and attach themselves to their shepherd and cling to him, following him where he leads them. They trust him implicitly and depend upon him for protection, pasture, and care. They seem to be tailor-made to need a shepherd.

God's people became sheep when they saw, by His grace, their neediness and turned to Him, submitting themselves to His leadership, protection, and care. He changed their nature from that of the goat to that of the sheep, a much more humble nature which is to God's liking.

These sheep are the ones that God will set on His right hand, the side of favor and honor. Then He will say to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

FINALLY SEPARATE

It is then that God's people will finally be safe. We will not be hampered by the temptations of Satan because he will have been thrown into the bottomless lake of fire along with all of his angels and those who followed him. Because we will have been given a new body that is perfect and not subject to sin, the flesh that was so riddled with sin will not hamper us.

We will not be bothered by the evil influences and threats of this world because it will be gone, burned to noth-

ing. In its place will be a new Earth, a perfect one. God will have prepared a new Jerusalem as the seat of His kingdom and for His people.

John's account of the words that he heard in God's revelation to him describes the best that we are to experience. It is a promise that God's people can take great comfort in because we will be there to hear them. "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:3-4)

As was said earlier, there will be no effort required on our part to be separate. We will be living with God in a truly separated place. It will be God and us forever loving and communing, happy and content. It is then that we will have fully realized true and complete separation. And we will never have to worry about it ever changing...finally separate!

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